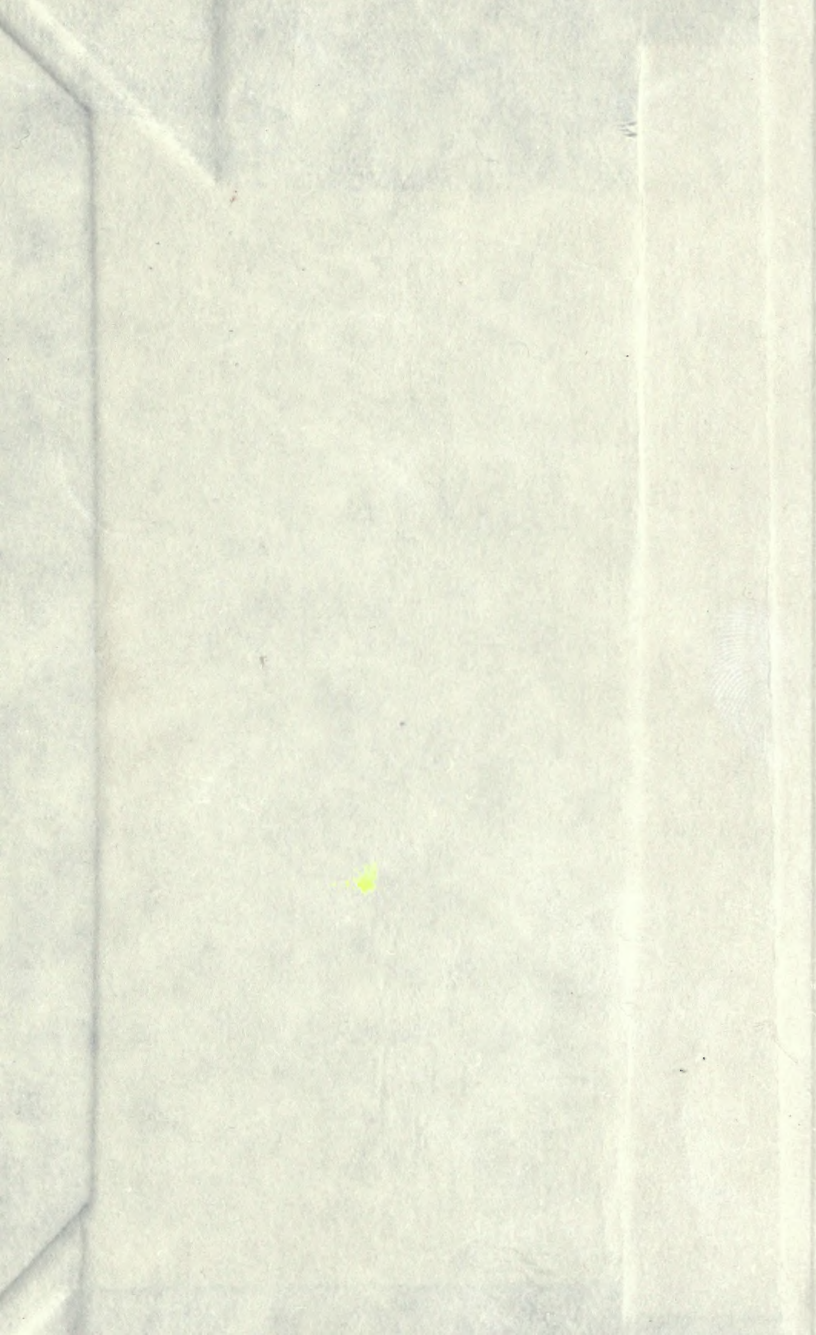


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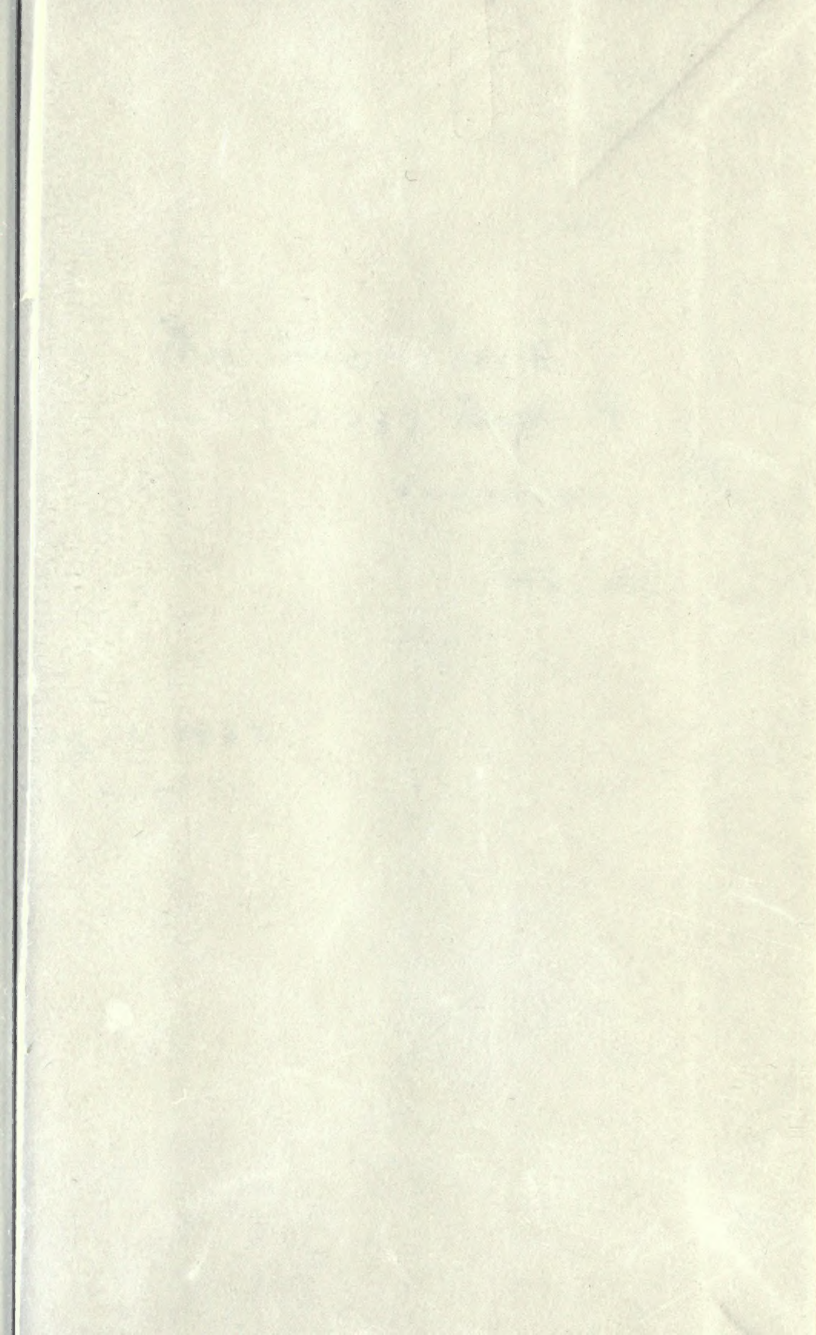
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May 11, 1922.

Plays for a People's Theatre. IV.

The Green Ring

PLAYS FOR A PEOPLE'S THEATRE

1. THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM. By
DOUGLAS GOLDRING.
2. TOUCH AND GO. By D. H. LAWRENCE.
3. THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND
THE GLORY. By HAMILTON FYFE.
4. THE GREEN RING. From the Russian
of ZINAIDA HIPPIUS. By S. S. KOTELI-
ANSKY.

The Green Ring

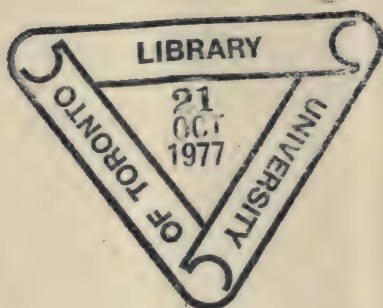
A Play in Four Acts

*Authorised Translation from the Russian
of Zinaida Hippus, by S. S. Koteliansky*

LONDON: C. W. DANIEL, LTD.

Graham House, Tudor Street, E.C.4

1920



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NOTE

ZINAIDA NICOLAYEVNA HIPPIUS (born in 1867) began her literary activity as a poetess in the beginning of the nineties of last century. Hippius, together with a group of young writers, represented the "new movement." They were nicknamed *décadents*, symbolists, *æsthetes*, etc., chiefly for their opposition to the strangling influences of "civic" motives that prevailed in Russian literature and in the periodicals of that time.

Hippius and her group introduced new motives into Russian literature. Thanks to them were translated into Russian the works of the French *décadents*, symbolists, of Oscar Wilde, of certain Scandinavian writers. And doubtless the "new movement" had a great influence on the younger generation of writers. The new movement has been superseded by still newer movements, but the original iconoclasts were Hippius and her husband, D. S. Merezhkovsky, several of whose extremely interesting works have been translated into English.

Hippius is a very gifted poetess, novelist, and literary critic of the highest standing in Russia. Her works include three volumes of poems, five volumes of stories (*Black and White, Mirrors*), several novels (*New People, The Devil's Doll*), a volume of essays (*A Literary Journal*), also *La Révolution et la Violence* (*La vraie force du Tsarisme*, in collaboration with D. S. Merezhkovsky and D. Filosofov), and several other books.

The Green Ring is her first play.

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL ARSENIEVITCH YASVEIN, *a Journalist ("UNCLE MIKE," the man who has lost his taste for life).*

HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH VOZZHIN, *Consulting Engineer (an old friend of UNCLE MIKE. They live in the same flat).*

HELENA IVANOVNA, *the wife of VOZZHIN, from whom he parted a long time ago.*

ANNA DMITRIEVNA LYEBEDEVA, *a widow, a friend of VOZZHIN, who occupies the adjoining flat.*

SERGE, *her son, a schoolboy.*

SOPHINA (FINOTCHKA) VOZZHIN, *the daughter of HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH and HELENA IVANOVNA, who lives with her mother in Saratov.*

ROUSSYA, *a High School girl, niece of MICHAEL ARSENIEVITCH ("UNCLE MIKE").*

NICK, *her brother, a schoolboy.*

VALERIAN, PETE, LYDA, VERA, ANDREW, *and other young people.*

Two maids: MATILDA, a Petrograd girl at Vozzhin's, and MARFUSHA, a provincial woman, servant to HELENA IVANOVNA VOZZHIN.

THE GREEN RING

ACT I

The flat of HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH VOZZHIN, Consulting Engineer. A large living-room. To the left, in a deep recess, is the door leading into the corridor. It is covered with screens. At the back: two doors — left, into the drawing-room and VOZZHIN'S study; right, into the reception-room and hall. The right door is also covered with screens. In the right wall, front, a small door leading to the rooms of VOZZHIN'S friend, MICHAEL ARSENIEVITCH YASVEIN (Uncle Mike). Comfortable sofas, pictures, but no luxury. Front: table laid for breakfast. HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH and ANNA DMITRIEVNA are finishing breakfast.

ANNA is a round-faced, pleasant, happy young woman, tastefully dressed in morning frock, but not peignoire. On the back of the chair is a fur wrap.

ANNA. I shall have to speak to your Matilda again, Hippolyt Vassilievitch. She hasn't brought the sugar-tongs; and just look at the lid of the coffee-pot!

VOZZHIN. O! that was yesterday. It got chipped yesterday, she says.

ANNA. Then she ought to have got another. No, Matilda is all right so far, but of course you have to keep an eye on her. Your cook is good—better than my Mary—but she is careless. Whatever happens, whether you have people to dinner or I am breakfasting with you, off she goes to Mary for this, that, and the other thing. Fortunately, she has only to cross the landing from door to door.

VOZZHIN. Let her. She cooks well. Michael Arsenievitch is satisfied.

ANNA. No wonder. He is so fastidious. He may have lost his taste for everything, but not for good cooking. I always smile. . . . My Serge and all the youngsters who hang round Uncle Mike—do you know what they call him? The man who has lost his taste for life. But he certainly hasn't lost his taste for a good dinner. It makes me laugh. . . . Where is he now? At home?

VOZZHIN. He's in bed. Last night he muttered something about finishing an article, went to bed late, and said he wouldn't get up to breakfast. He won't be long now.

ANNA. Well, let him rest. I don't want to see him. But, my Serge—every minute, "Where is Uncle Mike?"—"I must ask Uncle Mike"—"We have arranged with Uncle Mike"—"I'll run and see Uncle Mike"—every minute of the day (*laughing*). Aren't you tired of him—Serge, I mean?

VOZZHIN. I never see him. He must go straight to Mike. Lots of 'em come. All Serge's chums. Girls too—sisters—Roussya Shapovalov, for instance, with her brother Nick. I suppose he gives them books.

ANNA. Are the Shapovalovs his first or second

cousins? Nicky is in the same form as Serge. What books could he give them? If it were not Uncle Mike, your old friend with whom you have lived for so many years, I should think they were forbidden books (*laughing.*) Or perhaps he supplies them with sweets.

(MICHAEL ARSENIEVITCH YASVEIN (*Uncle Mike*), *the man who has lost his taste for life, enters. He is about forty, lean, tall, young-looking, clean-shaven, very precise, indifferent expression, rather immovable features.*)

ANNA. We were just talking about you. Did you sleep well?

UNCLE MIKE. No. I didn't have my sleep out. I shall go to bed early to-night. How are you, my dear? (*He kisses her hand.*) You have finished breakfast?

ANNA. Rather. I must rush home and dress to go out. We're going with Hippolyt to a concert this evening. You haven't forgotten, Hippolyt Vassilievitch?

VOZZHIN. I remember, I remember.

UNCLE MIKE. I'm not surprised at you, Annette, but take care you don't wear Hippolyt out. He's no youngster, thank God.

ANNA. Well, he's not Uncle Mike. He hasn't lost his taste for life yet. . . . Yes, we were just talking, and I was wondering why the children hang round you so much. My Serge is the worst of the lot. Why do they adore you?

(MATILDA *enters, a smart Petrograd maid with an air, dry, imposing, wearing a cap.*)

MATILDA (*to VOZZHIN*). A young lady is asking for you, sir.

VOZZHIN. For me! What young lady?

MATILDA. A stranger. Very young.

VOZZHIN. No, not for me. Surely it must be for Michael Arsenievitch. Go and make sure.

ANNA. Ah! . . . A stranger!

(MATILDA *goes out.*)

ANNA. And what do they like in you? You have lost your taste for life.

UNCLE MIKE. They like that. My having lost my taste for life. I don't interfere with them. I don't want anything for myself from them. And with my understanding I can help them. I may have lost my taste, but my understanding of life remains. I am useful. I am a living book for them, a book of reference. They can open it where they like. They know how to read. . . . But you won't understand. You don't care for reading.

ANNA (*slightly nettled.*) Why shouldn't I understand? Am I so insensible? My Serge is just a child. I know him well enough. And he . . .

(MATILDA *returns.*)

MATILDA. The young lady says she hasn't come to Michael Arsenievitch but to Hippolyt Vassilievitch. She insists on seeing you, and says she has come from the country.

ANNA (*interrupting*). Well, let her come in here, Hippolyt Vassilievitch. It is interesting. Who are your girls from the country? Very interesting, if it isn't a secret.

VOZZHIN. What secret? Ask her if it is on business or—a relation, Matilda. Some muddle. Probably it's for Michael Arsenievitch.

MATILDA. The young lady gave her name, Sophia Hippolytovna.*

(VOZZHIN *jumps up*.)

VOZZHIN. Sophina! What! Come to see her father? Me! Sophina! Little Sophina! Is she a little girl? Who is with her?—But it's impossible.

MATILDA. A young lady. She is alone. What do you require me to say?

VOZZHIN. What? To say? I don't understand. How can it be? Wait, Matilda, wait—or . . . no . . . Is she from Saratov? Alone? But it is only a week since I wrote to her. I was going—But . . . Ridiculous! Nonsense! A mistake! My little girl alone!

UNCLE MIKE. Hippolyt, be quiet. If it is Sonia, it is Sonia. How long is it since you saw her? It's four years or more, isn't it? Since you intended going to Saratov? Well, she's about sixteen now. She is a young lady. Why little girl? Go at once. Or wait, you are so agitated. I'll go and fetch her.

(UNCLE MIKE *goes out*. MATILDA *follows*. ANNA *gets up, takes her wrap hastily from the chair*.)

ANNA. I'll go, Hippolyt. It is your daughter. It must be. I'll go through the passage to my own flat. I couldn't meet . . .

VOZZHIN. Yes, go, my dear. Good God! I don't understand. Sophina! Finotchka! . . . Go. Don't

* "Sophina" and "Finotchka" are pet names for Sophia.

catch cold. The stairs are draughty. Wrap yourself up. . . . Sophinotchka! Good God!

ANNA. Well, well! Why be so excited? Don't forget the concert this evening!

VOZZHIN (*distractedly*). Yes, yes, of course. But I'd better go myself.

(*He goes to the door on the right without looking at Anna, who has wrapped her fur round her, waited for a while, tried to say something but has not said it. She quickly goes to the door on the left. On the threshold VOZZHIN collides with FINOTCHKA. UNCLE MIKE follows her in.*)

UNCLE MIKE. Well, here is your little girl. (FINOTCHKA looks for a second without moving at HIPPOLYT, then impulsively embraces him, clings to him and whispers loudly.)

FINOTCHKA. Daddy dear! Daddy dear!

UNCLE MIKE. Sonia! Just look at him. He hasn't come round yet. He'll be crying soon. He can't believe that little children grow with the passage of time into real people.

(HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH is confused and happy, delighted yet anxious, and somehow afraid. First he takes her to the sofa without releasing her hands. Then he reaches to the table. Speaks abruptly, puts questions, and does not wait for an answer, and again bustlingly rushes to the table.)

VOZZHIN. You'd better sit here. Yes. We have finished breakfast . . . It is nothing. It's all right. I'll tell the maid.

FINOTCHKA. No, Father; I don't want anything.

VOZZHIN. Won't you? Won't you have some tea?

UNCLE MIKE. Just like a child! You'd better ask her what brought her here?

FINOTCHKA. O! Uncle Mike, wait! I can't pull myself together. He hasn't recognised me. He hasn't seen me for such a long time.

UNCLE MIKE. I haven't seen you for a longer time. I recognise you.

FINOTCHKA. And I recognised you at once, Uncle Mike. You stayed with us for two summers in the Volga. You told me about Hamsun.

VOZZHIN. About Hamsun? But you were only eight then.

FINOTCHKA. What of that, Daddy? Surely people remember everything.

VOZZHIN. I don't know. So long . . . Finotchka. I'd written to you . . . I was going . . . and suddenly——

FINOTCHKA (*seriously*). I received your letter. We have been here only three days. We are in a hotel, and Marfusha is with us. Mummy came to the doctor's. She was sent to a consultant. She was ill, and we were in trouble. Mummy is to take a treatment here. The course will last more than a fortnight.

(MATILDA, while she is speaking, has cleared the table and brought in tea.)

VOZZHIN. So . . . Yes . . . Well? Splendid! Magnificent! . . . Here's tea . . . Will you have tea? . . . Let us have tea.

(*They come to the table. SOPHINA is in a fur cap, with a muff. VOZZHIN bustles about, cannot strike the right note, can't get used to his daughter. UNCLE MIKE stands apart smoking.*)

VOZZHIN. Cream? Will you have cream? Finotchka? Writing to you as though all the time you were a little girl, as you were last time. So? And you never wrote about anything clearly. I mean about yourself and life. . . . (*After a silence*). How are you getting on at school? You must be nearly in the top form but one. How could you come now? You must be missing your lessons.

FINOTCHKA (*after some silence*). Mummy didn't want to come, but it was impossible. I implored her. I persuaded her. But I'm not at school. I left long ago.

VOZZHIN. How? Left? Why? It's impossible!

FINOTCHKA. It's true. I left. I have teachers.

VOZZHIN. Is it better with teachers?

FINOTCHKA. I don't know. No. I'm not getting on very well. Bad, not good. Forgive me, Daddy, for not writing to you. I couldn't hurt you. I've become lazy.

VOZZHIN. I don't understand. You . . . you have become lazy? Why—you were always first. And about your school—you wrote to me. Besides, you always were a famous bookworm. I know that. Why this sudden change? (*After a silence*) How has it all happened, Finotchka? What have you been doing with yourself all this time? Surely everything was all right. You had plenty of friends. . . . Tell me!

FINOTCHKA. Everything is all right. . . . As usual. I'm quite happy.

(UNCLE MIKE *leaves unnoticed*. VOZZHIN and FINOTCHKA *remain silent for some time*.)

VOZZHIN. Yes. So then . . . You were all right.

And did you stay as usual on the Volga in the summer?
The same place?

FINOTCHKA. Yes, the same place.

VOZZHIN. And . . . You walked and read all this summer? You should have written . . . I would have sent you books. It's difficult to get books at Saratov. . . . Perhaps somehow—you'd get to like them again. . . .
(*After a silence*) Still, it is a pity. Your leaving school. Friends . . . Your own life . . . All sorts of things.

FINOTCHKA. It can't be helped, Father.

VOZZHIN. Are your teachers good? All right?

FINOTCHKA. All right . . . as teachers go. (*They are both silent.*)

VOZZHIN (*with a sudden impulse*). Finotchka! My little girl! I can't . . . I can't . . . You're all I have; why are you like this? Tell me, has anybody hurt you? Well, I'm to blame. . . . For four years I've been going . . . always something prevented. I always intended, thought I would go. . . . And now you have come and you are like a stranger. I can't speak. I can't find anything to say. I don't know what has been happening.

(FINOTCHKA *puts her cup away, covers her face with her hands and begins to cry loudly like a child.*

VOZZHIN *in confusion bends over her.*)

VOZZHIN. My little girl! My dear, dear little girl!

SOPHINA. I am not crying. I am not crying. Leave me alone. You want to know how I live. . . . Well! Bad, not good. You must know. Not good. And you, you are not there—terribly, you are not there. . . . Letters are impossible. How can one in letters——?

VOZZHIN. There's no need for letters. You have forgotten that I am always with you. If only I knew——

SOPHINA. You are not there. . . . Never, never are you there. You have been away for so many years. I left school. All the same, they would have expelled me. During the long interval, before the whole school, I slapped Kate Shanturov's face.

VOZZHIN. Good God! Finotchka!

SOPHINA. Yes. Yes. . . . How dared she! We had a slight quarrel and suddenly she said: "Your mother is Sviridov's mistress. Your father sold her to Sviridov. The whole school knows it." How dared she? If she said it again I would slap her face again.

VOZZHIN. Good God! What's the meaning of it all?

SOPHINA. Don't talk. Wait! Do you think I believe what she said? Not a word of it! I couldn't help slapping her face, but I didn't believe a word of it. It is quite simple. Mummy fell in love with Sviridov, and both of you agreed that you should go away and that it was better so. I remember everything. I understood everything then. You thought I was a child—couldn't understand. Sviridov can't marry. His wife is ill, and in the manufacturing class a divorce would mean that his father would send him away from the factory. I know everything; and although Sviridov never really lived with Mummy, she was like a real wife to him, in love—not a mistress at all. She has her own money and her own house. I am alone with Mummy now. . . . I don't want Sviridov's teachers. I'd rather not learn at all. I'll be a laundrymaid or a chambermaid.

VOZZHIN. What! Sviridov's teachers? You don't live on Sviridov's money. If you know everything, then you surely know that I am sending money.

(SOPHINA *does not listen.*)

SOPHINA. And it isn't my fault if I hate him. I love Mummy. I love you, and because of him you are never there. Because of him Mummy — Mummy — is so wretched and ill and always worrying, always alone. He hates me, too, and is afraid of me. When I'm not there he shouts at Mummy as if he had really bought her, and when I am there he doesn't dare. . . . When they quarrel and he goes away, Mummy cries with me. She is weak, Mummy; I console her. It is such a pity. I would—some day I will—— (*She stops sternly.*)

VOZZHIN (*whispers in horror*). Fina! Fina! what are you saying?

SOPHINA (*with a sob*). And you are not there, Daddy dear. If only Mummy—if only one could help her to see herself.

(VOZZHIN *kisses her, strokes her hair, and trembles.*)

VOZZHIN. My own. If only I had known. But I know nothing. I'm just a fool! I know one thing. It's impossible. It can't go on like this. You shan't leave me now. I must think and talk it over. I'll arrange everything.

SOPHINA. Will you? (*She catches her breath and smiles.*) Forgive me, Daddy. . . . I won't cry any more. I knew I should only have to see you, and then you would find a way. I implored Mummy to come, I begged her so much to come. She is ill, nervous, and Sviridov is in England just now on business. He didn't often come latterly. He was cross. Mummy cried so much once that I made up my mind to fetch him. Well, they made it up. Only, Mummy herself is beginning to see through him. But I can do nothing alone.

VOZZHIN (*furiously*). And you between them. Doesn't she see that?

SOPHINA. Father dear! For God's sake! She is so unhappy! She is ill!

VOZZHIN. Yes, well. Yes, well. Of course I must (*he paces up and down*). There. I will talk it over. I must talk it over with her.

SOPHINA (*brightening*). With mother? Will you really? Can you? Will you . . . see her?

VOZZHIN. Good God! of course I can. It's splendid of you to have come. I must. . . . It's impossible in any other way. We are not enemies. Good God! (*paces up and down*). Only, of course I must know how she regards it. How to arrange. . . . I am ready.

SOPHINA. Dear Daddy, darling, darling! I knew you would find a way. I'll tell Mummy. Let us fix the time. We are in a hotel quite near here. I'll arrange. You will come. . . . Daddy! O Daddy!

VOZZHIN. But only if she is very unwell?

SOPHINA. She is better already. In a few days she will be quite well. I'll come to you every day. May I? And we'll arrange. . . . Now I'll be off. Mummy is alone. My own dear Daddy, how thankful I am.

VOZZHIN. You'll come to-morrow? But you can't go alone.

SOPHINA. I'll take the tram. Daddy, what nice cakes you have, and sweets? But I can't spare another moment.

(SERGE, *Anna Dmitrievna's son, enters. He is a tall, thin schoolboy, with three books.*)

SERGE. Hippolyt Vassilievitch! Good morning! Isn't Uncle Mike here? I want to see him for a second.

VOZZHIN. Of course. You want to see Uncle Mike? He was here a moment ago. This is my daughter, Serge. Isn't she a big girl? She's come up from the country. She, too, remembers Uncle Mike.

(SERGE and SOPHINA hold out their hands a little shyly.)

SERGE. Have you only just come?

SOPHINA. Quite recently. What are your books?

SERGE. French. On the history of Syndicalism. Uncle Mike says there is another book on the subject, viewing it more widely. I've been immersed in it for the last week.

(UNCLE MIKE enters from the next room.)

SOPHINA. I know nothing about Syndicalism. I once came across an article, but it is difficult to get books in our town.

UNCLE MIKE. Well, if you stay with us you will get to know about everything.

VOZZHIN. What good is Syndicalism to her? That's what I can't understand.

UNCLE MIKE. It doesn't matter if you don't understand. Are you going, Sophina? It's quite dark, and you are a new comer here. Serge will take you as far as the tram. Are you free, Serge? You'll make friends on the way. . . . You'll have to introduce Sonia to Roussya and Nick.

SERGE. And Lyda. I am free, Uncle Mike. What tram do you want, Sophina Hippolytovna? I'd better see you to your house. If you'll go along I'll overtake you. I must get my overcoat. I am only just across the landing. (He goes towards the door, but comes back.)

O! yes, Hippolyt Vassilievitch. Mother told me to remind you about the concert to-night. Half-past seven sharp.

(He goes out quickly. SOPHINOTCHKA says good-bye to UNCLE MIKE and goes out by another door. VOZZHIN follows her. UNCLE MIKE sits in a chair and lights a cigarette. After a moment VOZZHIN enters, alone.)

VOZZHIN. I've completely lost my bearings, If you had only heard, Mike. . . . *(He paces up and down.)* I can't sit still. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. I heard. I was in the next room. If you tried to tell me, you'd only make a mess of it.

VOZZHIN. Good! So much the better. You agree that I must have her here, what!

UNCLE MIKE. Well . . . Go on.

VOZZHIN. There can be no two opinions. Even if I did not love her as I do . . . I feel that she is the only thing in the world that I love . . . Even then it would be a crime to leave a child in such surroundings. I can see now what it is like. . . . You don't know. You can't imagine.

UNCLE MIKE. I can imagine.

VOZZHIN. It is as though my eyes had suddenly opened. . . . What was I thinking of? . . . Well . . . What was I to do, then, after that crisis of eight years ago? Helena Ivanovna was honest and straightforward, and told me at once she loved that swine. . . . Well, I don't want to call him names. That's her business. . . . That little manufacturing tyke, Sviridov. She loves, loves, loves. I simply had to give her her freedom. The child was seven years old. How could I take her from her mother? How could I know what was going

to become of me, where I should settle, what would happen to me? . . . Could I have done otherwise?

UNCLE MIKE. How do I know? You didn't consult me, nor do I ever give advice.

VOZZHIN. What right had I not to go away? Or to go away and to take my little girl with me? A child, who understood nothing! To deprive a child of its mother's care. Had I the right or had I not?

UNCLE MIKE. But surely it makes no matter now.

VOZZHIN. Of course. Of course. It is necessary now to think of the present . . . not even to think . . . I'm going to have her here. That's settled. If you knew what a wonderful girl she is! I shall send her to a good private school and then to the University.

UNCLE MIKE. It is essential that they should both agree.

VOZZHIN. What do you mean by both? Her mother isn't mad. Surely she must realise!—And Finotchka, you heard yourself how weary she was. It's nonsense. The only thing to do is to arrange it as quickly as possible. My eyes have been suddenly opened.

UNCLE MIKE. Wait a moment!

VOZZHIN. Well, what next?

UNCLE MIKE. Nothing. I simply wanted to ask: you mean that you are thinking of having Finotchka here?

VOZZHIN. I'm not thinking. My mind is made up. I'll give her my bedroom, a large room. It's no good to me. I'll sleep in the study. What is the best school near here? And you, Mike, will have one more niece.

UNCLE MIKE. I can go if you want my rooms. . . . Wait. I wasn't thinking about that. I wanted to ask

you. Are you sure that Finotchka will take kindly to Anna Dmitrievna?

VOZZHIN (*stops*). What! to Anna Dmitrievna?

UNCLE MIKE. Yes. So you've forgotten Anna Dmitrievna. I wanted to remind you.

VOZZHIN. Forgotten . . . No. Well, O! yes. I'd forgotten. . . . I . . .

UNCLE MIKE. That's it. . . . You make that question clear. Finotchka is the x in the problem. She may rebel. Is it worth while to exchange Mummy and Sviridov for Daddy and the widow Lyebedeveva?

VOZZHIN. How dare you? How can you be so rude? My whole soul is quivering, and you . . .

UNCLE MIKE. Whether it quivers or not, the fact remains. . . . I don't give you any advice. I simply indicate the fact and want you to see it.

VOZZHIN. Don't be alarmed. I see it. I understand. Anna Dmitrievna.—

UNCLE MIKE. Well, why do you stop?

VOZZHIN (*resolutely*). I'll break with Anna Dmitrievna.

UNCLE MIKE. So!

VOZZHIN. Yes. So! You are right. When the child comes to me she shall enter a pure life. Everything for her. I don't matter. And what of Anna Dmitrievna? I am a simple man. She is a good, kind-hearted creature. We were both lonely. It's quite understandable. And what comparison can you draw between this and Sviridov?

UNCLE MIKE. The more surprising that you are so quickly making up your mind to break with that good-hearted creature—"Please look for a flat in another

street. I want purity and I am no longer lonely." Why?

VOZZHIN. Mike! friendship is friendship, but look here, I won't have you make a mock of me.

UNCLE MIKE (*shrugging his shoulders*). How stupid!

VOZZHIN. And she will be the first to understand! If she loves me she must understand!

UNCLE MIKE. If she loves you she must clear out—eh?

VOZZHIN. All right . . . all right . . . I must . . . I have made up my mind! Sonia will live with me. And nobody, neither you with your malicious sneers, nor Anna Dmitrievna—nobody will make me change my mind. It is so clear and simple.

UNCLE MIKE. It is so simple! Don't boil over. You'll cool down too quickly.

VOZZHIN (*sitting heavily in a chair feebly and helplessly*). Ah! Mike, I am a simple man. I only want to understand. I am weak. Yes. It is true. But, you can see . . . You should help me, support me.

UNCLE MIKE. Poor old Hippolyt! It's all the same to me. I am an observer, I never give advice. I'll see what comes out of it.

VOZZHIN. Yes, that's what you are. You strike a chill, Mike.

UNCLE MIKE. Drop that sentimental twaddle and don't shout about your decision. Believe me, your girl is more clever than you are, and if anything happens it will happen as she wishes and not as you do.

VOZZHIN (*jumping up*). Enough! Why am I talking to you like this? It's my affair. My daughter

and my decision. . . . I've learned not to take offence at you. I'll do what I must do.

(He goes out.)

UNCLE MIKE *(with a bored expression)*. How silly!
How silly! And how naive you are!

(Curtain.)

ACT II

UNCLE MIKE'S study. *A huge room. The walls covered with bookcases. On the right, by the windows, a desk and a Turkish divan. By the left wall, in the corner, a piano. Usually the room looks very empty, like a library. Now the centre of the room is occupied with chairs gathered evidently from different rooms and arranged in a circle. On the chairs are sitting a number of young people, boys and girls. Some of them are in their school uniform and blouses, the girls wearing half-short skirts and plaited hair, but some of them are more grown-up. One boy about sixteen, PETE, is wearing a jacket. BORIS, who is almost a man, wears a working-man's blouse. LYDA, who looks a child, is about fourteen, and very serious. ROUSSYA, a schoolgirl, is slim and lively, and wears a little black apron, with a short, thick ginger plait. On her temples the hair is very curly and rebellious. . . . In the middle stands a little table, at which are seated NICK, ROUSSYA's brother, who is the chairman of the meeting, and a tall, dark boy, VALERIAN, who has been reading a paper. SERGE is sitting by the desk, and on paper in front of him he is making notes. On the Turkish sofa, quite apart, is UNCLE MIKE. Near the sofa, also apart, sitting on a chair, is FINOTCHKA. She has no hat on, but is holding her muff. KATE and MAROUSSYA, sisters, VOLODYA, RAMZIN, VOOLITCH,*

VERA, ANDREW, and others. *They are all in careless attitudes, and some of them have notebooks. Voices are heard.*

VALERIAN (*finishing*). I am only pointing out that we have here two corresponding periods. . . .

LYDA. And I objected, and I repeat that if you are looking for recurrent waves the years '61 and '63 correspond more closely. . . .

VOLODYA. There is no close similarity, and the deduction as to the correspondence is arbitrary.

VERA. The point in question is a detail, and we have not sufficiently studied the period as a whole to be able . . .

PETER (*in a deep voice*). What's periods? We are taking decades, and even less than that. . . .

NICK (*the Chairman*). Wait a moment. We are getting into a muddle. Has anyone else anything to say with regard to Valerian's paper on Granovsky and Hegel? . . . No one else? Right. . . . Now let me say a few words and then we can pass on to personal matters. I say that it is useless to argue like this. We must seek knowledge, and there is so terribly little time. That is why we apportion different questions among ourselves, so that each can specialise and impart his knowledge to the others. We must know more about the past, and then the rest will come of itself. Do you agree?

VOICES. Agreed. Certainly. But don't let Valerian make deductions. Of course we must learn as quickly as possible. Why shouldn't we argue? No. No. It is impossible to attain impartiality. We haven't time. . . .

NICK. Right. . . . Right. We will argue when the

discussion gets personal. Presently, if you like. And, Serge, don't report the discussion in the minutes—only the addenda and explanations.

SERGE. I've only reported Volodya and Andrew with regard to Hegel, and Maroussya's digest of Granovsky.

UNCLE MIKE. May I rise on a point of order?

NICK. Please, Uncle Mike, we are now passing to a general discussion. Still, it must be in order.

UNCLE MIKE. That is what I wanted to say. To-day, besides myself, who, though not a member of the Society of the Green Ring, am a permanent guest at its meetings, there is also present another stranger, Finotchka Vozzhin. She came to see her father, who was not at home, and I took the liberty of asking your permission. . . .

NICK and ROUSSYA. Yes, yes. We were very glad. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. Many of you are already acquainted with her, and have seen her often during her fortnight's visit.

ROUSSYA. Yes, certainly. I was convinced that she would join the Green Ring, even if she doesn't stay here. We have many members in the provinces.

NICK. Wait. Uncle Mike, you know that a new member must first answer certain questions, and then be informed. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. That is what I was leading up to. You are many. You are just about to open your general discussion, and during it you might touch on and make clear the chief objects and the meaning of your Green Ring.

FINOTCHKA. May I? Shall I speak myself? . . . Yes? I am here by chance. I have not been told any-

thing about the Society, and yet I am not surprised. I feel it is exactly as it ought to be—and couldn't be otherwise. I very much want to join you, though there is a great deal I don't know. . . . I don't know anything. . . . And on the questions of which you were talking about I haven't read anything. . . . At home in Saratov I used to have friends, but just lately I couldn't . . . keep it up. I am quite out of it now. . . .

NICK (*nodding*). Well, yes. Your life at home is difficult. That is always a severe handicap. It is difficult if one is alone among the old with no one to turn to. But even that teaches one something . . . which is in its way necessary; in the manner of finding it. . . . In a word, experimental. . . . I mean the acute collisions with the world of the old.

ROUSSYA. We ourselves must settle our lives and our relations with the old. We ourselves must behave reasonably.

PETE (*in a deep voice*). Many of us have a trying home life in various ways—sometimes it seems that there is no possible way out. For those who are at school—have intellectual parents—of course it is easier.

ROUSSYA. Nonsense! Nonsense! You are standing on your own feet, Pete. Nobody forces you to do things. You don't have to twist and dodge. There is plenty of work in your bookbinding works. I would be only too glad. And all of us are up to our necks in work. Time does not wait.

VOLODYA. They have so messed up life that there is no possibility of standing on one's feet in time. Our time is close upon us already, and people nowadays grow quicker. . . . Stand on your own feet, if you can. . . . We are dependent on others. Wriggle out

of it, if you can, and it is even worse for women. . . . Marriage! Go and—marry.

SERGE. That's nothing. I mean, it is bad, of course, but it is necessary to take stock of what is, of the present, for the sake of the future. We must size it all up to make use of it so long as things remain as they are, to select what is necessary. Well, as to marriage? One needs to be very strong to face that: some particularly urgent reason, otherwise one would never stand on his own feet: although formerly, in the 'sixties, it used to happen that girls got married on purpose in order to get away to study. This is of the same kind. But I am only saying that it is necessary to take stock and to wriggle out as best you can. There's no harm in that. No one will be hurt by it.

FINOTCHKA. I don't understand. . . . But we are still very young. Why is there no time? Of course we must study. But there is plenty of time.

SERGE. There is no time at all.

MAROUSSYA. We wish there were, but there isn't. We aren't ready yet. That is why we are in such a hurry. It is impossible to live as we are. . . . You have heard that people are now growing quicker. The time will soon be here.

LYDA. It will be worse if we are not ready in time. . . .

VERA. And unprepared as we are, we shall be called upon. . . .

ANDREW. Strindberg is right. . . . We must be prepared for life. All the young people of previous generations felt of a sudden that they were cleverer than anybody. But we are the new young people. We are aware of ourselves. . . .

VOLODYA. Yes. It is awfully strange that all previous generations never failed to make identically the same mistake. The supporters of the doctrine of eternal recurrence base themselves on that.

MAROUSSYA. Partly, perhaps, because science was in an embryonic stage?

NICK. I wonder! But of course the idea of creative evolution had not yet been assimilated by the human consciousness generally. The meaning of history and its movement, which is gathering speed like a hurtling stone, is for the first time realised by us. . . . We *must* hurry.

FINOTCHKA (*disconcerted*). No. I don't understand. . . . Yes. We must hurry. . . . But suppose we aren't ready?

SERGE (*shouts*). That's our misfortune. We shall be unprepared, and who will there be to live? Soon no one will be able to live.

ROUSSYA. No one. No one. So the old will go on sitting there and, willy-nilly, they will mess up everything. The present muddle will be small in comparison. It will be so difficult. . . .

FINOTCHKA. And the other young people who are older than we. I don't know. . . . But they are regarded as young.

NICK (*interrupting*). We know all about that. They too are old. They cannot live at all. They have already had *their* history, their own. Do you understand? Their own past—unsuccessful. They haven't come off. . . . And we are fresh. To us everything is not *our* history, but history generally, for study and investigation, and not a passing infatuation.

ROUSSYA. Ach. . . . You put it too subtly! Fina,

I have a brother, a student. You have seen him. They are all the same! They are all flabby or broken. They have gone through their infatuation, weakly—and given it up. And now they are either interested in nothing—nothing, just living on,—or they kill themselves.

ANDREW. Take a narrower example and you will see, it becomes clear. Take literature. They have outlived their various writers—Andreyev, and what's his name, who wrote "Sanin." And to us these men, just like Pisemsky, Bielinsky, and Benedictov, are in the same plane—the historic—for investigation. We take a clear view of everything.

UNCLE MIKE. Pardon me, parenthetically. One wouldn't say that you too suffer from a lack of conceit.

ROUSSYA. That surely is necessary, Uncle. We believe in ourselves. It isn't our fault that the old-young people are like that—futile and ignorant.

SERGE. They got stuck in the groove of history. Nothing should be asked of them—the very old—the fathers and mothers are better. From them one could take what is necessary, just as from books.

VOLODYA. One should just take from them what is necessary, but not let oneself be imposed upon by them.

ROUSSYA. Yes. One has to be very careful. But neither must we force our beliefs on them. Handle them with mercy.

FINOTCHKA. With mercy?

ROUSSYA. Yes. Yes. Without any egoism. Let them be as they like, act as they think best: in their personal affairs, of course—not in our common affairs—for themselves. Only, they must not meddle in our affairs, in our common life, in what is foreign to them. . . .

SERGE. That is all right as regards the old people who are honest; for we shall never come into contact with the young-old people!

NICK. Yes. They will just fade away. My brother was very taken up with the question of sex. And now he is completely indifferent. Living on. He thinks that's how it should be. He knows nothing. A fortnight ago a friend of his shot himself. He had moods. He knew nothing either.

LYDA. I should like to discuss one question.

VOLODYA. If it has to do with sex, then don't. We'll leave it for the time being. We are all one family. Sex can be left for the present.

VOICES. It isn't necessary. Afterwards—one must have knowledge about that too.

LYDA. Suppose I am in love. . . . But I wanted to talk about something else.

ROUSSYA. But we are all in love. How strange! Which of us isn't in love? But it doesn't bother us. . . . Why worry about sex? I think it is far too early for us to bother about it. If we go deep into it we shan't solve the problem and we will miss other things. . . . It is even unwholesome.

NICK. Of course, one can be in love without coming to any decision. As regards . . . That has been raised already, and we decided as regards sex in the physiological sense that abstinence is best.

PETE (*in a deep voice*). That is, hygiene and all that. Living among cattle, the more sex disgusts one——

BORIS (*agitatedly*). Even in age you are all fit. And I am in my twenty-third year. I know the Green Ring not by its age in years but by its youthfulness of soul.

. . . In all the rest I can fall in with you, but I have loved and . . .

SERGE. That is nothing, Boris. We have talked about that already. What hasn't happened in life? And if you should so fall in love as to want to marry, where's the harm in that? You know that on broad lines we made that subject clear at the outset.

LYDA. I didn't want to talk about sex at all. . . . About being in love—I just happened to mention it. . . . I wanted to talk about suicide.

ROUSSYA. Again, about suicide?

LYDA (*offended*). Certainly not again. I said nothing at all when we were talking about the young-old people killing themselves. In my view the desire is found amongst us too.

FINOTCHKA. Ach! How true! Sometimes it is so difficult, so difficult. Everything is disgusting, and you think it is better not to live. It is safer. (*Confusedly*) I am always alone. . . . And I know nothing. . . . And it is so hard to go on. . . . Disgusting. . . . Generally.

LYDA. To me life is all right. Only yesterday I was coming home from school, and on the stairs—it was pretty dark, and suddenly I looked down the well and was overcome with a desire to throw myself down—just to stop living, and entirely without any cause.

UNCLE MIKE (*from the sofa*). May I give you a piece of information?

NICK and SERGE. Open yourself, Book. . . . Tell on, Uncle Mike.

UNCLE MIKE. You have already admitted the probability of Metchnikoff's theory of the physical causes of pessimism in the immature. Metchnikoff writes of the fauna of the intestines, and recently another investi-

gator discovered the possibility of the pressure of certain brain cells on others in immature organisms. . . . In a word, the same physical causes. So that the desire to die is purely physical.

ROUSSYA (*catching him up*). Yes. Yes. If the soul is empty, old and weak, then it is useless to struggle against physics. And a young soul isn't afraid of it. Finotchka, here, is alive, and Lyda has not thrown herself down the well.

LYDA. And I would not do so for anything in the world.

FINOTCHKA (*agitated*). How could one vouch for it? I cannot. One is surrounded with unhappiness and horror and ugliness, and everything is chaotic, and I am all alone, as if I were all alone in the world. The one I love is always out of reach, and I don't know what to do with myself, or who wants me, and I can't find out what use I am to myself, and what is the best thing for me to do. . . . I must do something, I can't help myself. . . . I do something, and the result—nothing. I can't help anyone. . . . Nor does anyone—anyone, help me. Surely it isn't my fault that I am all alone and know nothing. . . .

(*Nearly all have risen. FINOTCHKA is surrounded by them. The lively ROUSSYA kisses her.*)

NICK. You are not the least little bit alone now.

SERGE. You are with us for ever.

VOLODYA. She was like one of ourselves.

ROUSSYA. We don't know a great deal yet. There are many things that we can't master yet. . . You may forget, but then you will remember that there is the Green Ring. . . . That means that you are no longer

alone. The Green Ring solves and arranges together the difficulties of those who belong to it.

UNCLE MIKE. Well you have made it all clear now. . . . I am very glad.

FINOTCHKA. O! Uncle Mike, I have suddenly become so happy. How good you are, Uncle Mike, how good!

UNCLE MIKE. Why good? Still, I am very glad.

FINOTCHKA. Uncle Mike isn't good. He is leather! I mean, he is our book, a lovely book in a nice leather binding (*playfully kissing him*). Everything is the same to him, and yet everything makes him glad. Isn't it so, Uncle Mike? (*She kisses him again.*)

UNCLE MIKE. Stop! Stop! I am very glad you are all so happy. But where do I come in? . . . Go, play, dance and be happy.

ROUSSYA. Let's dance. . . . The discussion is finished. . . . Isn't it? . . . Andrew, play as you did last time, will you? I'll take your place presently.

VOICES. Splendid. . . . Let's. . . .

(*They carry the chairs away and laugh, and ANDREW opens the piano.*)

ROUSSYA. Can you dance, Finotchka?

FINOTCHKA. Which dance?

ROUSSYA. It doesn't matter which. Do you love dancing?

FINOTCHKA. Awfully!

NICK. We do different dances. There are some jolly good new ones. . . . Volodya's mother can dance, and so does he, and he shows us. It isn't difficult. Will you dance with me? I'll teach you.

(ANDREW plays. Nearly all dance. BORIS clumsily but attentively with LYDA, ROUSSYA with SERGE.)

UNCLE MIKE. Well, I say! They'll soon be dancing the Tango! Take care you aren't infected by the fashion.

(He lifts his feet on to the divan.)

ROUSSYA *(stepping in front of him)*. All dances are good to us, Uncle Mike, provided we like them. They are all new to us and all old. What's the matter with the Tango? Ah! How I love a waltz! Andrew! Andrew! Do play a waltz.

(They dance a waltz, and go from dance to dance. Some of them are awkward, and there is some happy confusion, which is soon righted. From the side door near the sofa where UNCLE MIKE is sitting appears the head of HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH VOZZHIN, and then he enters irresolutely.)

VOZZHIN. I say! Another ball at Uncle Mike's! Something like gaiety! Where did you pick up so many youngsters?

UNCLE MIKE. A splendid ball! And of course you come sneaking in to upset us all.

VOZZHIN. How do I upset them any more than you do?

UNCLE MIKE. I am one thing, you're quite another story. Please sit down. . . . You're back early.

VOZZHIN. Good Lord! And Finotchka! How does she come here? Lord! I wasn't at home. I was expecting her during the day.

(FINOTCHKA has already noticed her father, leaves NICK at once and runs to HIPPOLYT VASSILIEVITCH.)

FINOTCHKA. Daddy, you have come! I have been waiting for you with all the others at Uncle Mike's. . . . I wanted to see you so much to-day.

VOZZHIN. You are tired. See how flushed you are! Sit down and rest.

FINOTCHKA. No, Daddy, it's nothing. . . . I was waiting for you, and they were all here, and afterwards they began to dance. It's a long, long time since I danced, Daddy!

VOZZHIN. Well, that's right. So you have been happy?

FINOTCHKA. No. No. Listen. I have something very important to say to you. Thank God you have come back!

VOZZHIN. What! What is the matter? Don't frighten me.

(They go a little to one side. FINOTCHKA clings to her father. Her manner has changed. Her face is serious, grown-up, with brows knit.)

FINOTCHKA. Daddy, can you—to-morrow?

VOZZHIN. To-morrow? What do you mean, dear?

FINOTCHKA. Well—Oh! dear, have you forgotten? You promised. You agreed. Don't you remember the first time I came to see you?

VOZZHIN. Ah! to see mother. Finotchka, but it was you. . . . I am always ready. It is very important that I should see her. It was you who postponed and never even mentioned it to me again. To me it is very important.

FINOTCHKA. Mummy was not well. She was upset. I know it is better. She wants it herself now. . . . I

mean, she isn't afraid it will upset her. Her nerves are better. I've been telling her about you. . . .

VOZZHIN. What have you been telling her?

FINOTCHKA. Just talk about you. . . . Nothing particular. . . . About Uncle Mike too. You know Uncle Mike came to see us.

VOZZHIN. I see! That's news to me. What about him?

FINOTCHKA. Nothing. . . . It went off splendidly. They talked away. Mother got quite happy. Uncle Mike is so good at not upsetting people. She liked him. He has changed greatly for the better during these years, she says. Daddy, dear, so—to-morrow. It can't be left any longer. Her cure is coming to an end. To-morrow at twelve. Will you?

VOZZHIN. At twelve? Good. Splendid. It means—twelve. That's good. . . . We must clear it all up. . . . It is necessary somehow—Yes.

FINOTCHKA. How strange you are, Father! I don't understand. . . . You said you wanted it yourself.

(From the middle door ANNA DMITRIEVNA enters impetuously. A moment before the dancing and music have imperceptibly ceased.)

ANNA. What is it? What's going on? Uncle Mike, are you here? Are you with them? Where is Serge? Is Serge here?

SERGE. Here I am, Mother. What's the matter?

ANNA. That's what I want to know! Uncle Mike, Hippolyt Vassilievitch, what's going on? I came home and Serge wasn't there. I ran in here. Every room was empty, and in the farthest room there was a stamping of feet and a noise. I looked into the hall. Heaps

of overcoats, women, soldiers. . . . Why soldiers? Where did the soldiers come from?

VOZZHIN. Anna Dmitrievna, for the love of God! . .

UNCLE MIKE. Leave her alone. She'll come to.

LYDA (*in a ringing voice*). What soldiers? With a ginger moustache? It must be our orderly, Panteley. He always comes to fetch me.

ANNA. Panteley—to fetch you?

(MATILDA (*the maid*) enters immediately after ANNA DMITRIEVNA.)

MATILDA. The servants are waiting for the young ladies and a man came for Miss von Raben.

LYDA. That's what I said—Panteley.

ANNA. Ah! So you are Colonel von Raben's daughter. . . . Pardon! I didn't recognise you. I got such a start. God knows that I imagined!

ROUSSYA. Don't you recognise us either, Anna Dmitrievna? Don't be cross at our laughing. We don't understand why you were so frightened.

ANNA. You don't understand. Well, I had a real fright. I'm not a bit cross, though I don't see what there is to laugh at. Serge wasn't there. The place was empty. I heard voices somewhere. The hall was full of women, and soldiers. . . . Michael Arsenievitch is careless enough. Don't I know? Serge wasn't there. . . .

SERGE. But I am here, Mother, and the servants always come when we meet at Uncle Mike's. What is there in that to frighten you?

ANNA. Well, it's all over now. Come home, Serge. Thank you, Michael Arsenievitch.

UNCLE MIKE. It rests with Serge whether he comes to me or not. I invite nobody.

ANNA. Rests with Serge? Suppose I wanted him not to. . . . To feel ashamed of the anxiety he has given his mother.

UNCLE MIKE. Surely it is his affair.

FINOTCHKA (*to NICK in a low voice*). Still, I can't understand what Anna Dmitrievna—

NICK. Nonsense. She's taken like that every now and then. She doesn't know. She's afraid of everything. (*In a loud voice*) Roussya, come. . . . There's no one to fetch you. We'll go together. Though they ought to have sent some one to fetch me: schoolboys are not allowed in the streets late at night.

ROUSSYA. Never mind! Good-bye, Uncle Mike. Good-bye, Finotchka. Shall I see you to-morrow? No? O well, later on.

(All take leave and slowly go.)

ANNA. Hippolyt Vassilievitch. You as a father ought to understand me. Your daughter is here too.

VOZZHIN. Really, Anna Dmitrievna, what are you talking about? You should have seen how merrily they were dancing.

SERGE. Mother, come home. . . . Please come.

UNCLE MIKE. Good night. . . . Have a good sleep. . . . And I shall have to take your daughter home, Hippolyt, instead of Panteley, the orderly. . . . It is a good thing it isn't late. I shall have a good night's sleep. Allow me, Anna . . . I'll turn on the light in the corridor. Go ahead, Serge.

(SERGE and ANNA DMITRIEVNA go to the door to the left; after them UNCLE MIKE, to whom ANNA talks volubly.)

UNCLE MIKE *shrugs his shoulders*. FINOTCHKA and VOZZHIN *are left*. FINOTCHKA *has found her muff*. She *muses for a while, and suddenly laughs*.

VOZZHIN. Why——?

FINOTCHKA. It's so funny. . . . Shouting at Serge like that, and he . . . *He* is merciful.

VOZZHIN. What do you mean by merciful? . . . Who? . . .

FINOTCHKA (*bethinking herself*). No. Daddy . . . Not that. Just silly. It wasn't about that at all. . . . Daddy, the chief, chief thing . . . Don't forget! Daddy, everything in me is torn in two. . . . I don't know myself exactly what I want . . . or even if I dare to want it. I love you so much, Daddy. I always loved you so much! You are mine, Daddy, mine.

VOZZHIN (*embracing her and stroking her hair*). My little girl, my own. . . . my darling. . . . Be calm, we'll arrange everything. Everything will turn out all right.

FINOTCHKA. To-morrow . . . You . . . and mother . . . ?

VOZZHIN. We'll talk it over and think it over, and thresh it out. . . . To-morrow, dear, to-morrow!

(*Curtain.*)

ACT III

Furnished apartments in rather a pleasant house. A divan. A sofa. Between the windows to the left a square dining-table. At the back, a door into a little partitioned hall and passage. To the left, a door into another room (where HELENA IVANOVNA and FINOTCHKA sleep). By the table, covered with a white cloth, MARFUSHA, Mrs Vozzhin's maid, is standing. She is from Saratov. She is washing up. MARFUSHA is middle-aged but not old, with a pleasant face. She wears an apron and a kerchief with the corners flung back. Her hair is brushed straight back.

One o'clock of a greyish day.

MARFUSHA (*busy, grumbling, clattering the cups, evidently in a bad mood, raises her head and looks round*). Who's there? . . . Is anybody there? Don't scratch. The door isn't shut.

(MATILDA, Vozzhin's maid, enters. *She is in a plush coat, hat with a feather, and has a large velvet muff, all the pretensions of a Petrograd maid. Her nose is red with the frost.*)

MARFUSHA (*not recognising her*). Pardon. . . . Whom do you want to see? If it's for the mistress, she isn't in. She'll be in soon with the young lady.

MATILDA. How do you do, Marfa Petrovna? Good morning! A note from the master to the young lady.

MARFUSHA. O Saints! . . . It's Matilda Ivanovna. I should never have thought it. . . . I'd have took you for a guest by your clothes. . . . So that's who you are? . . . Excuse the litter.

(MATILDA, *pleased, shakes hands.*)

MARFUSHA. I should never have thought it, because when I took notes to the master I never went further than the kitchen, and there you weren't so dressed up. . . . How could I recognise you?

MATILDA. Is there anything remarkable about it? It's the custom to wear hats there and to be well dressed, especially if you are going some distance.

MARFUSHA. I say. . . . Not being used to hats, I'd never think of it; and besides that, it goes to my inside when I have to cross the streets in this Petrograd of yours. . . . I can't find corners and turnings, and taxis whizzing past you one after another. . . . Really, I had to ask the young lady not to send me out with notes. Pay a man to carry it. They say there are men here who carry notes.

MATILDA. O yes. Messengers. But I love errands, instead of going for a walk.

MARFUSHA. Please sit down, Matilda Ivanovna. The young lady must be here soon. She can't be anywhere else but at the hospital—kept there at the baths.

MATILDA (*sitting down*). I understand you. After the country the traffic of the city's even dangerous. . . . A woman was ground to pieces by a tram, every little bit of her, every little bit! So that they could not mortify her.

MARFUSHA. O Saints! We have trams too, but

that they should reach such a pitch of cruelty is unheard of with us.

MATILDA. Every place has its little ways. That must be admitted.

MARFUSHA. You'd better take off your coat, Matilda. . . . You can have a warm, gratis. . . . Custom is custom, and one must be charitable. . . . Why do they say there are very few Russians in Petrograd?

MATILDA. What do you mean, Russians?

MARFUSHA. More Finns and Germans. . . . Even their names are not Christian. . . . Your father's name was Ivan, but they call you—excuse me—Matilda.

MATILDA (*offended*). I'm Russian myself. My Christian name isn't Matilda at all. It is Matriona. Only, as I live in good houses, it is more civilised to be called Matilda for the gentry. . . .

MARFUSHA. Well, I declare! . . . Indeed, your customs here . . . I'd never have guessed in all my life. . . . Do please forgive me Matriona Ivanovna, if without reflection I put you down as Matilda. . . . What intemperate people they are to call you Matilda! With us you'd be Motya. Much more decent. (*She drops a cup.*) O! Da——! (MATILDA *picks up the cup.*)

MATILDA. It isn't smashed, only chipped. . . . Why do you worry yourself with the plates and dishes, Marfa Petrovna? . . . In furnished rooms there ought to be a girl to do it. You have a right to it.

MARFUSHA. A right? My mistress expects it from me. We have our own plates here. The mistress is so used to her own cups that she cannot abide any others. Why let one's own things be smashed to bits by other people?

MATILDA. Your mistress seems to have her fads.

MARFUSHA. Fads! Fads! . . . She is ill. Her life is like that—without charity.

MATILDA. And have you been with them long?

MARFUSHA. About nine or ten years. I entered their service when your master was with them. Soon after I came to them and had lived with them for a bit, that story happened. The young lady was a tiny thing then. He left.

MATILDA. So they parted for good then? And you stayed with the mistress?

MARFUSHA. Yes. For all these years I remained and there's been a muddle ever since. . . . Is it any profit to me to stay? I try to go away, but I cannot. Life is pretty bad too, and I stay out of humanity. It is painful to look on, and as painful not to.

MATILDA (*curiously*). But they say that her lover is rich. That's why they parted.

MARFUSHA. Saints! A lover! Well—call him a lover! . . . To get round a woman, whether she's a lady or a common woman—well, if the husband doesn't mind and takes it for granted as soon as anything is said. . . . Very well, I'll go. . . . What else could you expect? Of course there's a lover at once to put the lid on it. . . . It happened before my very eyes. Thank God, and I can tell all the truth.

MATILDA. Still, it is unpleasant if there's a lover. . . .

MARFUSHA. It is, indeed, very unpleasant. . . . As for him. Semyon Spiridonovitch—a nice lover. If you're a lover, then behave as a lover should—modestly, nobly. . . . But no, he starts off wrangling with her. . . . He doesn't like this, and that isn't what he is used to, and his fancy changes. And he would come in liquor with

his friends and ask for God knows what—impossible things. . . . Off she goes into hysterics. “I love you,” says she, “for ever and ever.” . . . And he sets off on his snarling and yarling, and on they go with their duet until hell is let loose and the young lady takes sides.

MATILDA. O! What a shame? And where does the young lady come in? . . .

MARFUSHA. The young lady is the only one Semyon Spiridonovitch is afraid of. . . . She has only to take sides with her mother and he backs out of it a bit. . . . When she was a tiny she used to shrill at him: “You dare not!” At first he would just snigger like a fried fish, then cool down a bit and take his hat. . . . And then at last there’d be a lull.

MATILDA. A scandal, then? The usual thing. (*After a silence*) I’ve heard—is it true that the master intends taking his daughter to live with him?

MARFUSHA. Who?

MATILDA. His daughter. Your young lady to live with us. A child, says he, living in a scandalous atmosphere. Well, he, as a father, can’t let it go on. He said as much twice to our Michael Arsenievitch—in private conversation, of course.

MARFUSHA (*agitatedly*). And how did you hear it? It’s impossible.

MATILDA. Why is it impossible? He said so quite clearly: “I shall and will take her.”

MARFUSHA. O my Saints! So now, after all this time, he thinks he’ll take her. Never can it be. It’s unheard of. Without the young lady my mistress wouldn’t know where to turn. Spiridonovitch will demolish her in one scoop. . . . And the young lady would never consent.

MATILDA. Well, I don't know about that. . . . She won't consent, but at the same time it's "Daddy" and "Daddy dear. It is terribly hard to live without you," and "Why aren't you with me," and all that. . . . And it's her fancy too.

MARFUSHA. A lot you understand about her fancy. There's no question about her caring for him. She trembles—at a letter from him, or anything to do with him. She is a child. She hasn't the wits to know who has hurt whom. Perhaps she thinks her mother drove him out. But she knows that she cares about her mother and so—well, that there's no room for more! She has seen many things happen! If I were to tell you! Saints alive! What do you think is the matter with the poor lady? Why is she ill? She took poison. That's the truth—before God it is. They had the greatest difficulty in pulling her round. For his tricks. But the young lady was afraid of nothing, and went straight to his house at the factory to fetch him. . . . She brought him herself. She did indeed. He could not wriggle away from her. . . . How would it be possible without the young lady? I wouldn't stay a day without her myself. . . . Out of mere humanity I couldn't stay.

MATILDA. It's no good upsetting yourself over trifles, Marfa Petrovna. . . . You just think she doesn't fancy it. But I tell you I heard with my own ears—I have quite forgotten—"Remember," says she, "you promised to arrange for us not to live apart any longer." It's no business of mine whether he takes her or not. I'm in the house one day and next day I'm gone. I'm only talking because your denseness irritates me.

MARFUSHA. It's you who are dense. That's why you

are irritated. . . . I'll agree that Sophia Hippolytovna may have said something, but not about that. . . . I do know what she fancies.

MATILDA (*with interest*). Has she got a sweetheart?

MARFUSHA. That's as God wills. But how is it possible, situated as we are? . . . Well, she fancies that her mother should lawfully return to her legal husband, and that she, their daughter, should be with him and let Spiridonovitch go packing.

MATILDA (*laughing*). Well, that will never come about. I'll bet on it. . . . What will he do with his fancy lady when he returns to his wife?

MARFUSHA. What are you talking about, Matriona Ivanovna? I can't make out.

MATILDA. You can't make out because you come from the provinces. It is quite an ordinary affair. What is Anna Dmitrievna to him? What do you think? Simply his mistress, though she were a thousand times a lady. . . . She worries me to death. I took a place with two bachelors, and in course of time it turned out quite differently. She thrusts her nose into everything. She badgers me. Ach! Why isn't this cup clean? Ach! Where are the three little spoons? Ach! Why is there a stain in the passage? . . . Ach! and ach! I'm fed up with her.

MARFUSHA. What do you mean? Saints! Does he keep a woman in his flat?

MATILDA. Not in his flat exactly. Something very near it. Her flat is across the landing. She has a son, a boy at school. . . . But what good's her flat to her. She's always hanging about ours, or if she isn't there the master goes across to hers, and they go to theatres, restaurants, out together.

MARFUSHA (*agitated but also intrigued*). O Saints! Has he sunk so low as that? He's been deceiving us. And our young lady in your house. If it is like that, it must be obvious.

MATILDA. The girl comes and goes. While she is there it's nothing but Daddy! Daddy! . . . Yesterday when she came he was out with his fancy at a restaurant and she went to Michael Arsenievitch. He had his nieces, all sorts. They had music and dancing. How could she notice? And Anna Dmitrievna's son was there too, doing their new dances.

MARFUSHA. As you please, Matriona Ivanovna. But he is a deceitful wretch, without humanity. You have amazed me. I'm struck dumb. I can't get over it.

MATILDA. I understand your being so astonished. But why should you take on so about it? It's none of your business.

MARFUSHA. I've been looking on at it for eight years, and now the wickedness that is being revealed! Wicked and deceitful! It wasn't for nothing that I always thought him artful. . . . Out of sheer humanity would I spit on it all, let it all go to blazes.

MATILDA. There's nothing so particularly wicked and deceitful about it. Who doesn't nowadays? Every man to his own taste. But Michael Arsenievitch hasn't any weakness. He has that lazy disposition. You can see that at once.

MARFUSHA. But still. How? (*A door is heard opening in the passage. Voices.*) Here they are!

(*She drops and lifts up the towel. MATILDA gets up, quickly puts on her coat. FINOTCHKA enters in a fur cap, and HELENA IVANOVNA VOZZHIN. She is*

rather thin, not tall. Quick, nervous movements, speaks very quickly; slightly faded but still pretty, pale, her hair showily dressed, which does not suit her. Dark dress, not quite in the fashion.)

HELENA. Finotchka, why did you keep on saying "We'll be late! We'll be late?" We aren't a bit late. Only half an hour. How could one help being late with such a cab? Dragging and dragging on. . . . Well, you know. Marfusha——(*noticing MATILDA*) O! Pardon. You——

FINOTCHKA (*interrupting*). It is Matilda. Have you come from father, Matilda?

MATILDA. Good morning, miss. Here is a note for you. The master said it was urgent, so I waited.

FINOTCHKA. A note? From father? It means, then . . . Is he at home? A reply wanted? (*Takes the note and begins to open it.*)

MATILDA. There was nothing about a reply. When I left master was at home. Two gentlemen came to see him on business.

FINOTCHKA. O! Good! (*Reading the note.*) Good! Good! Thank you, Matilda. If you find your master at home tell him we are waiting.

MATILDA. Yes, miss. Good-bye, madam. Good-bye, miss.

HELENA (*taking off her hat, arranging her hair, looking at MATILDA, nods her head*). Good-bye. (*MATILDA leaves. MARFUSHA follows her.*) What is the matter?

FINOTCHKA. He writes that he will be an hour and a half or two hours late. Someone came to him on business. He promised to be punctual. That is why he is writing.

HELENA. Nonsense! What formality! Now, or an hour later, or when he can. Making a great to-do about a simple affair. If he wants to come to me, by all means. I've nothing against it. We are not enemies, thank God. . . . If there is not time . . . well, it doesn't matter. But to surround it with so much solemnity. . . .

FINOTCHKA. It was I, Mummy. I asked him to be punctual.

HELENA. You need not have done that. We were late ourselves. If he had not found us in he would have come another time. I'm glad there is no one here. The baths are fatiguing. One has to lie down and rest. (*She lies down on the sofa.*) Or shall I go to the bedroom? It will be more comfortable on the bed.

FINOTCHKA. As you please, Mummy. (MARFUSHA enters.) Marfusha, haven't you boiled the eggs? Mummy must have lunch.

MARFUSHA. Presently. I'll put them on the spirit-lamp. I haven't washed up yet.

(*She goes into the bedroom, returns, goes there and back several times, sometimes muttering to herself.*)

FINOTCHKA. Be quick, Marfusha. There's no time later on. There will be people here. Father is coming! Father is coming!

MARFUSHA. Father! . . . I see. . . . I see. . . . Well, we *are* having a lot of company. Michael Arsenievitch has been several times—without any fuss.

HELENA. What are you muttering about? Why are you talking like that? Please don't forget yourself.

MARFUSHA. As if I had time to forget myself. . . . Only this Petrograd of yours—well—sickens me.

Everyone wearing hats, trams running over people. I've seen enough of all that filth.

(She goes out.)

HELENA. Impudence! . . . *(laughing)*. Why did she talk about Michael Arsenievitch? Has she fallen in love with him? He is really most sympathetic. A journalist and such a gentleman.

FINOTCHKA. Was he always like what he is now?

HELENA. What—a gentleman?

FINOTCHKA. No. I mean—indifferent. You know we all call Uncle Mike the Man who lost his taste for life.

(MARFUSHA enters.)

HELENA. Not witty. Well, I heard a story about him a long time ago, about his having a *real tragedy*. He loved a woman. . . . She betrayed him, or she played some trick on him. . . . I don't know. He denounced her straight out and left her. Then, suddenly, he received a letter saying that she was dead.

FINOTCHKA. O! How terrible!

MARFUSHA. They're all alike—villains all of them.

(Goes out.)

HELENA. I've already forgotten, but as far as I can remember she wasn't dead. She wrote to frighten him. He rushed to her, and she wasn't even ailing. . . . Well, then of course—

FINOTCHKA. He was overjoyed at her being alive!

HELENA. O! you understand nothing! She did it on purpose. To him it was the greatest shock.

FINOTCHKA. How strange people were!

HELENA. Who? Michael Arsenievitch?

FINOTCHKA. Yes. And the woman. How strange they were! It is quite impossible to understand.

HELENA (*dreamily*). You can't understand. But it's quite natural. She loved him and wanted to get him back. . . . In love one doesn't think, one doesn't reason. . . .

FINOTCHKA. I don't know. But surely Uncle Mike didn't lose his taste for life just because some silly woman told him a lie. . . . That couldn't be the reason. He is very deep, Mummy. He sees everything. He understands everything, and he is good. And it is so nice when old people are good.

HELENA. What nonsense! Michael Arsenievitch old!

FINOTCHKA. But he is nearly the same age as father.

HELENA (*raising herself on the sofa*). Has your father grown very old? Has he gone grey? (*She gets up.*) It is not years but sorrow that makes one old. I am still quite young, and after my illness—look here, on my left temples there are quite a lot of grey hairs.

(*She goes to the mirror.*)

MARFUSHA (*at the door*). The eggs are ready. Shall I bring them here?

HELENA. No. No. I'll have them in there. I'll rest a bit, my nerves are on edge. Are you coming, Finotchka?

FINOTCHKA. I don't want to.

HELENA. Well, as you like.

(*She goes into the bedroom. FINOTCHKA is alone, paces up and down, looks at the clock and then through the window. She is visibly agitated. She takes a*

book, gets up, sits down again. At last a knock at the outside door is heard. FINOTCHKA rushes and opens both doors wide, says something to her father.)

FINOTCHKA. Here you are! Have you left your things downstairs?

(Both enter. VOZZHIN wipes his moustache with his handkerchief.)

VOZZHIN. So it doesn't matter my being late? Are you at home? . . . I had someone on business, very urgent business. I was afraid they would stay a long time and that you would be waiting.

FINOTCHKA. Quite all right, Daddy. We came home. Mummy had lunch and went to lie down. All right. . . . Shall I tell her, Daddy? Shall I? I will go at once.

(She goes quickly to the door on the left. VOZZHIN is left alone for a few moments. He looks round the room, takes up the book which FINOTCHKA has just read, looks through it, puts it down, slowly paces up and down; sits down, thinks. From the bedroom door enters HELENA IVANOVNA. She is in the same dress, but over it has put a pretty coloured scarf with spangles.)

HELENA. Hippolyt Vassilievitch! I am so pleased.

(VOZZHIN jumps up and they hold each other's hand for a long time. Then VOZZHIN kisses her hand.)

HELENA *(with a somewhat forced gaiety)*. Now. Sit down. *(They sit down side by side on the sofa.)* Let me have a look at you. So many years have passed

by and—you haven't changed but for the grey hairs in your beard. . . . And you look well, not like me. I am getting thinner and thinner.

VOZZHIN (*clearing his throat*). You're no better, Helena Ivanovna?

HELENA. O! I was so ill. Illness doesn't improve one, or restore one's youth. I am better now. The treatment here is nonsense, of course. It was Fina who implored me to try it. Still—on the whole I am better. My nerves are good for nothing, Hippolyt Vassilievitch.

VOZZHIN. Yes. O well! I quite understand. . . . You must have a real rest, take a cure.

HELENA. Ah! Hippolyt Vassilievitch! It is all very well to talk of a cure, but it is my soul that suffers. I have been through so much, I have so many wounds in my soul. Why should I conceal it? I feel now that you understand me. We have never been enemies. . . .

VOZZHIN. Enemies! God forbid. . . .

HELENA. Yes. Yes. And I feel that you are an understanding friend listening to me. It's so comforting; so rarely does it happen to me to find such comfort. At bottom I am lonely. . . . I mean—wanting a friendly interest. Fina is a child. One talks to her. But how can she understand the depths of suffering? O! I don't want to complain. I do not like complaining. Who is to blame? No one's to blame. We have all bravely to bear our own destiny. . . . That's why I don't complain. I don't repent of anything, anything. Just as I told you straight out eight years ago, so I tell you now. Yes, I love Semyon Spiridonovitch with a true, great love, the love which stops at nothing, which in itself carries its own justification.

VOZZHIN. Yes, but if the object of that love . . . I mean, if in course of time . . .

HELENA. What has time to do with it? What has time to do with love? Love is love. It is eternal and is its own justification. Time! More than that, if in moments of weakness I ever ceased to feel it, to feel love in myself, all the same I would believe that in the most secret depths of my soul it is alive. This belief is the only thing that supports me. Hippolyt Vassilievitch, it alone gives me the strength somehow to struggle on through my hard, hard life.

VOZZHIN. But still, even if love is, as it were, no longer felt . . .

(HELENA *does not listen.*)

HELENA. My life is hard, Hippolyt, even in little things, in everyday things? I—you know me, I shrink away from everything. I shrivel up. The tiniest grain of dust wounds me, and now I have to swallow heaps of dust until I am choked, and I suffer. And if I cry, it is only when I am in real physical torture, when a physical pain——

VOZZHIN. But why, good God, why torment yourself so cruelly? Those who are with you must suffer also.

HELENA (*not listening*). I'll say more. Even if fate were finally and irrevocably to part us, even if I knew that I should never again see him whom I love, all the same I shall believe that love lives in my soul!

VOZZHIN. Good God! Helena Ivanovna! Helena—my poor dear—friend! . . . Who would take away your belief if it supports you. . . . In life we are alone. . . . I mean, you create many sufferings, which are really outside you. . . . Why? If love is independent of——

Why not think of your own peace of mind, and your health? . . .

HELENA. I must bear my cross to the end. (*She cries and continues in altered tone*) Semyon Spiridonovitch has such a difficult character. . . . So difficult. . . . Sometimes I simply don't know what to do. . . . Day after day. Day in, day out. . . . Scenes! He hurts me. I just lose my head. But I can't help it. . . . I can't. . . . Once I fell in love with him.

VOZZHIN (*reaching for her hand*). Calm yourself. . . . My dear friend, be calm, I implore you. Let us think. . . . Believe me, from the bottom of my heart I . . . You must calm yourself.

HELENA. Thank you. Thank you. . . . I am calm now. . . . I have told you and it has eased me. Don't pity me. I have my treasure, my love. No pity! Sympathy is what I need.

VOZZHIN. If I could only help you. . . .

HELENA (*smiling*). You helped me then—long ago—when you believed at once in my love, and so quickly and so generously gave me my freedom. . . . And now! . . . It is my Fate. . . . How can one help? . . .

VOZZHIN (*getting up and pacing up and down*). Yes. . . . Fate. . . . We all have our Fate. . . . Of course . . . I'm so glad I have seen you, Helena Ivanovna, and that you have welcomed me as a friend. . . . You trusted me at once . . . frankly. . . . Dear God I am glad. Now it is easier for me to talk over with you the object of my coming. . . .

HELENA. And what is that? What is it all about? I am frank with you, Hippolyt Vassilievitch, I do not hide my inmost thoughts from you. I can tell you everything, everything. . . .

VOZZHIN. Now, well . . . Of course—I wanted to talk about Finotchka.

HELENA (*with surprise*). About Fina? . . . What about her?

VOZZHIN. Well—now. . . . I have heard that she has left school. . . .

HELENA. O! Some trifling matter. I believe Finotchka to blame. I could never get a sensible account of it from her . . . But she is obstinate. She insisted on my taking her away. . . . Now she has two teachers preparing her for her matriculation.

VOZZHIN. She doesn't get on well with teachers. . . .

HELENA. Yes. She is terribly obstinate. . . . She is at that age. Her character is forming. There's no need to take any notice of it.

VOZZHIN (*hotly*). No. There is every need! In my opinion it is necessary to take notice of many things. (*Quieter*) In a word, I want to say—it is a pity. . . . The child is so clever. . . . Without systematic studies she . . .

HELENA. Yes. But . . . Well . . . She will grow up and take a more serious view of things. But I am always ill. . . .

VOZZHIN. Of course. Of course. That is the point. I quite understand. . . . You ought to travel more . . . take a cure. . . . Go to the Crimea, for instance. . . .

HELENA. I had been thinking of the Crimea if circumstances permit.

VOZZHIN. Very well, then. (*He gets up and paces about.*) And I think I will have Finotchka to stay with me.

HELENA. Whom?

VOZZHIN. Finotchka. It's perfectly clear.

HELENA. Take her—where?

VOZZHIN (*pacing up and down impatiently*). Ah! My God! . . . To my house, to live with me. She must. . . . I'll send her to a good private school, she will have friends, company, work. Then she'll go to the University. She must. . . . Really. . . . She's grown-up, sixteen. . . . She shall go to the University.

HELENA (*mechanically*). To the University . . . (*She follows him with her eyes.*) The University? . . .

VOZZHIN. You will be travelling. You'll come here sometimes. You must understand, Helena Ivanovna. We have no right . . . A young creature at the beginning of life. . . . We must create a favourable atmosphere . . . give her every chance. . . . In my house she will find that atmosphere. Life will be regular, quiet, industrious. . . . Not only you and I, but Fina herself understands that the conditions in which she has been brought up . . . and still exist . . . are out of key. . . . Abnormal. . . . Fina herself.

HELENA. What? What? Fina herself! What?

VOZZHIN. Where is she? It's perfectly plain. Such a clear, natural thing. Fina! (*He calls*) Fina, come here!

(FINOTCHKA comes quickly from the bedroom. VOZZHIN is in the centre of the room, carried away by his own words, hurriedly. HELENA in a stupor sits motionless.)

VOZZHIN. Finotchka, I was just telling your mother . . . that it is impossible to go on. . . . You will go to a private school, and then to the University. . . . You remember you said yourself. . . . No longer shall we be separate.

FINOTCHKA (*brightening*). Ah! Daddy. Is it true? Really, really true? . . .

(*She moves towards him, and at the same moment HELENA shrilly exclaims. FINA runs to her, but stops.*)

HELENA. You—you . . . to live with him! And leave me alone . . .?—your mother, like a dog! Like a sick dog! University! Abnormal! Deserting me! I am not wanted! Like a dog!

FINOTCHKA. Mummy, Mummy, what are you saying? How can you?

HELENA. Go! Go! Desert your mother! That's all she deserves! Go to him! (*Hysterically screaming she falls on the cushions.*)

(FINOTCHKA runs to her.)

FINOTCHKA. Mother! Mother! You have misunderstood. . . . I'll never leave you. I'll never go away. . . . I swear by God, on my word of honour. . . . It wasn't that. . . . Mother! (*She jumps up and turns to her father, who is standing in perplexity in the middle of the room. She speaks quickly and bitterly.*) Father! What did you tell her? Why did you? She understood that I should go to you and leave her? Was that what she understood?

VOZZHIN. Fina, dear . . . But I thought . . . What else . . . I thought . . .

FINOTCHKA (*calls*). Marfusha, quick! Bring the salts on the little table! (*She attends to her mother, who goes on sobbing, senselessly repeating phrases.*) Stop, mother. I wouldn't leave you to go anywhere, anywhere! . . . (MARFUSHA enters with the salts.) (To

her father) Father! Please go. Better go now. I'll bring her round. . . . Please go, father. (*She takes him by the arm.*) I'll come and see you to-morrow. . . . Not now. . . . You see, she is ill. . . . She hasn't understood you. . . .

VOZZHIN (*going to the door slowly*). I'll go. But Finotchka, that's what I thought. She ought to take a cure and travel. . . . You would stay with me. . . . You said yourself . . .

FINOTCHKA (*stopping, amazed*). Father! What! . . . Is that your idea? You thought that—that I should leave her?

VOZZHIN. I didn't say . . . leave her. Why talk about leaving her. . . . But you must consider . . .

FINOTCHKA. That I should leave her in her unhappiness, for you! . . . O! father! . . . You didn't think that! You didn't want that! I love you so much, Daddy. You couldn't . . . (*Stopping short*) Be quiet! Be quiet! Go away now. I'll come to-morrow. I'll tell you myself . . . (*gently pushing him towards the door*).

VOZZHIN. Well. To-morrow—to-morrow . . . (*In an altered tone, beginning to take courage*) But remember, I have made up my mind firmly. I shan't give way. We must take the sensible course. . . . Remember you said yourself. . . .

FINOTCHKA. Go away! (*almost shouting*). O God! What shall I do? What shall I do?

(VOZZHIN goes out. FINOTCHKA runs to her mother, whom MARFUSHA has been attending. HELENA's sobs relax.)

FINOTCHKA (*with forced gaiety*). Mummy, my darling.

. . . Aren't you ashamed? . . . How could you? . . . Just look at me! Aren't you ashamed to imagine such a thing . . . that I would leave you? You have only frightened father. He never even thought . . .

HELENA (*feebly*). Well. . . . Delightful . . . live with him. . . .

FINOTCHKA. How silly! Say it is silly! How could I live with him? . . . I with him and not know where you were. . . . How could it be?

MARFUSHA (*muttering*). Absolutely impossible. That's flat!

FINOTCHKA. I shall be cross, mother, if you don't believe me . . . Father never meant that I should leave you. . . .

MARFUSHA (*muttering and taking away the salts*). What else could he propose?

HELENA (*plaintively and angrily*). Still, you yourself . . . He says . . . you aren't happy. . . . You love him. . . . You don't want to live away from him. . . . Don't, then! Please do me that favour. Only don't lie, and admit that you—

FINOTCHKA. I shall be angry, mother. (*After a silence*) Have you recovered yourself? That's it. . . . I never even dreamed of leaving you. And it's true. I do love Daddy. I believed that he . . . that you . . . (*hotly*). How could I know? I can't know everything, can I? . . . I thought that you somehow . . . that Daddy somehow would find a way. . . . And it would be good for all of us, and none of us need part. . . . And now . . . (*after a silence*) Daddy can find a way, but you frightened him off at once.

HELENA (*raising herself on the cushions and weakly smiling and sighing*). Silly child! You forget me,

my life, my cross. We don't know our fate. We can't decide our actions beforehand. . . . But as long as we have strength we should bear our cross. Hippolyt Vassilievitch understands that. I was deceived in him. He so rudely offered to take you away. . . . Ah! I cannot. . . . (*She smells her salts and recovers herself.*) But he ought to understand this, that for no one in the world—not even for you—have I any right to renounce. . . . To come together with your father. . . . How could it be?

MARFUSHA. Though I were in the presence of the Almighty, I say it is impossible. I am only a servant, but I can see that. Out of sheer humanity it's not to be thought of.

HELENA. What is not to be thought of? What is the matter? Ah, you understand, then? So much the better. Nobody asked your opinion.

MARFUSHA. Whether I am asked or no, I do understand that the master hasn't the faintest idea in his head of making such a proposal as my young lady imagines. . . . How could a young lady know? . . . There he is with someone already established in his house. Wife or not wife, it's not easily shaken off.

HELENA. Wife? What wife? In his house?

MARFUSHA. Well, there she is. . . . It's a shame, a sickening shame.

FINOTCHKA. Stop her, mother. . . . She goes on muttering. One can't make head or tail. . . .

HELENA (*agitated*). No! No! There's something in it! Marfusha, tell me plainly. . . . Is it just gossip?

MARFUSHA. It is likely I'd gossip. . . . I've been eight years with you . . . I've nothing to be ashamed of. . . . It's my business. . . .

HELENA. Will you talk sense?

MARFUSHA. No talk at all. He has had a lady in his house these many years. Their doors face each other. Just like man and wife. You can't stop people chattering. The young lady saw her many times at her father's house, but of course she doesn't understand. That's all.

HELENA (*bursting into a loud laugh*). Splendid! Splendid! Love, then! . . . A nice fraud, Hippolyt Vassilievitch! . . .

MARFUSHA. Love! ha! I have seen enough of their sneaking ways! Men! Chasing women and babbling of love! . . . But why tell lies?

FINOTCHKA *rushes at MARFUSHA, grips her shoulders; MARFUSHA drops cushion, towel, and other things, which she was taking to the bedroom.*)

MARFUSHA (*frightened*). Oh!

FINOTCHKA. You dare not! You shall not tell such lies in my presence! It is all lies, lies, lies! I'll throw you out! Get out! Get out!

(*She pushes MARFUSHA through the door and slams it.*)

HELENA (*still laughing harshly*). Ha! ha! ha!

(*She paces round the room.*)

HELENA. Why? Why is it a lie? It is very like the truth—only too like!

FINOTCHKA (*grimly*). Mother, I won't allow anyone, nor dare you. . . . Don't speak a word about father! It isn't true. It's a lie, a dirty lie. Don't soil your lips with it!

HELENA. You are just a little fool! Nothing else. Ha! ha! ha! At last he is free. That's his affair. But I blame him for that. What impudence, to want to take a young girl to his house! She shall go to the University—live a normal life. Go! Go to your father! . . . He has found you a new mother! This mother is ill and boring. . . . Perhaps the other will be more amusing. . . . Well, think it over! Make your choice. (FINOTCHKA *impetuously runs into the bedroom, HELENA is alone for a moment.*) Where are you going? No. What impudence! What impertinence! She shall stay with me! Suitable atmosphere! . . . Very! (FINOTCHKA *quickly comes out of the room in a fur cap and carries a muff pressed close to her breast.*) What now, Fina? Where are you going? I shan't allow you. . . .

FINOTCHKA. You won't allow me? (*quietly*). . . . Won't you? I will go. You shall not repeat a lie. I'll prove to you that you dare not. I'll go to him and tell him myself and let him tell you. At once! At once! So that you shall not be able to repeat that for one moment longer.

HELENA (*frightened*). Fina! Fina!

FINOTCHKA (*stopping at the door*). Don't be afraid. I shan't stay with him. Never will I leave you! I never thought of it! You know that when I say a thing I mean it. And now I must——

(*She goes out.*)

HELENA. Fina! O Lord! O Lord! Another cross to bear! Marfusha! Marfusha!

(*Curtain.*)

ACT IV

The room of Act I. The large living-room in VOZZHIN'S flat. Simultaneously enter SERGE (ANNA DMITRIEVNA'S son), and ROUSSYA: SERGE from the left door leading into the drawing-room, ROUSSYA from the hall. ROUSSYA is in a school dress, and carries a bundle of books.

SERGE. Ah! Roussya! Are you going to see Uncle Mike?

ROUSSYA. Of course. I'm going to Uncle Mike. I must see him for half an hour. Are you going too?

SERGE. No. I mean . . . I wanted to see him . . . I want to have a talk with him. . . . I've just been looking for Hippolyt Vassilievitch. . . . Mother sent me to see if he has come back. . . . What books are those?

ROUSSYA (*throwing the books on the table*). O! Tosh! School-books. I never take them with me, but to-day, of course—they stuck to me to-day, and I'm lugging them about. From school I went to Boris, and then to Pete's binding works, and my beastly *Hall and Knight* with me all the time.

SERGE. It's all very well. Though we sniff at *Hall and Knight*, I sometimes study school-books . . . to teach myself to be coherent and consistent.

ROUSSYA. A lot of coherence you'll get from them. Any little pamphlet is better than our text-books. No, Serge, you are an opportunist, or . . . I'll find a grander expression. You are a kind of workaday pantheist.

For you everything is a blessing—you believe there's some good to be got out of anything, even out of school-books.

SERGE (*shrugging*). And you just display a school-girl's childish rebelliousness . . . a revolt against text-books. . . . Just imagine!

ROUSSYA. No. You should imagine, you wiseacre. Your omnivorous tolerance simply terrifies me. The whole point lies in selection. Everywhere, always, the point lies in selection, and you are always ready with a blessing.

SERGE. How unjust!

ROUSSYA. Of course I'm unjust.

SERGE. I'm not a bit like what you take me to be.

ROUSSYA. Of course you're not. I exaggerate simply in order to drive my point home. I am sorry.

SERGE. Sorry? Roussya, really I'm not a bit like that. You don't know what a wild fellow I am. I hate the old vulgar arrangement of things, and the absurdity of their life, more than anyone—that idiotic decrepit backwardness. . . . Their power over life. But only I . . .

ROUSSYA (*sitting down on the divan, interested*). Only you—what?

SERGE. Hold myself in to accumulate force. What good would it do if I were at once to rebel against school, against mother, against the whole order of things? It's all false, if one doesn't look at it from the historic point of view. . . . I should be broken like the point of a pencil. . . . If it's a question of sharpening, then let iron be sharpened.

ROUSSYA. Yes. It's true. But we don't know how. You are funny, Serge. . . . You are right to want to

understand things better. But how can one endure? No power on earth could stand it. You with your cool-headedness. . . . But the rest of us. No. We can't.

SERGE. My cool-headedness? I try, I want to hold myself in, and I can't always do it. I quite realise that our meetings, The Green Ring, is only a laboratory. Not life. It is a preparation behind closed doors. We've nothing yet that we can take out into the world. And we must go on quietly. Even at our meetings I can't hold myself in. I simply boil over. Awful! . . . Childish, light-headed, careless, and we're not standing on our own feet yet. We're dependent on others.

ROUSSYA. We are dependent on others up till now, because things are so rottenly arranged.

SERGE. To take that order of things as it is, and stand on it firmly with both feet—there's where it ought to be! That would be a good jumping-ground. There—beneath the feet, it wouldn't be false. . . . For the old, for yesterday, it wasn't false. Only for us. . . . We can't live in it.

ROUSSYA. How hard everything is! . . . What you were saying just now, a laboratory, behind closed doors, is true. . . . It's true, but all the same . . . all that order of things is there and is creeping over us, whether you discuss it or not. There are some of us who are all right at the beginning, but they can't go on, they are soon ground down.

SERGE. If we hold together we can help each other.

ROUSSYA. Discussion doesn't help.

SERGE. Not discussion. . . . No. If circumstances . . .

ROUSSYA (*interrupting*). So to adapt ourselves to circumstances . . .

SERGE. No. To adapt circumstances to ourselves. . . .

ROUSSYA (*thoughtfully*). Wouldn't that . . . be wrong? . . . Wouldn't that . . . ?

SERGE. Do you mean the old?

ROUSSYA. Yes. Them too.

SERGE. It can't be wrong, because we treat them with mercy. They don't understand us, but we will understand them, and we'll always treat them with mercy. (*After a silence*) Still, sometimes it is hard to live . . . and there is nothing, nothing that we could do to make everything absolutely good—through and through. They have spoilt everything in life, and we have to hold ourselves in. I can say everything openly to you, Roussya.

ROUSSYA. I know. I believe you.

SERGE. I can't be anything but frank. I am close friends with many of our lot, but you . . . are more joy to me . . . than all. It is like when in summer after a very heavy rain and you go out, and suddenly there is a rainbow. . . . Roussya, you are like a rainbow. (*After a silence*) That is what you are.

ROUSSYA (*laughing*). A rainbow!

SERGE. A bright rainbow! And your hair curls so gaily. . . . Little ruddy rings on your temples. . . . Do you remember in the country, playing tennis, how they curled?

ROUSSYA (*laughing*). With the damp! How are they gay?

SERGE. I don't know myself. . . . But they are awfully gay. They must be so very, very soft. . . .

(*He sits by her side.*)

ROUSSYA (*moving away a little*). You're wrong. They are very stiff. Try!

SERGE (*touching her hair delicately*). True! But it's all the same. Delicious! (*After a silence*) May I kiss them, Roussya? . . . I believe I'm in love with you . . . have been for a long time.

ROUSSYA, I too. . . . Not a very long time, but still. . . .

(*She bends her head towards him, SERGE gently kissing her temple; then as they sit side by side their heads close together, holding hands in silence:*)

SERGE. What do you think, Roussya? Shall we later on—sometime—afterwards—get married?

ROUSSYA (*after long thought*). I think—later on—sometime—afterwards—we may. . . . But at present—

SERGE. It isn't worth talking about now. . . . I just wanted to know. And now there is joy enough. Roussya, you are my rainbow. . . . Isn't it a joy!

(ROUSSYA *moves away a little.*)

ROUSSYA. That's what I'm always saying. A wonderful joy! O Serge! dear Serge! (*She kisses his head and gets up.*) We don't deceive ourselves. We quite realise that all this . . . love, marriage, the family, children, and all that, is terribly important, madly important, enormously important. And . . . (*laughing*) somehow just now it isn't very important. I mean there is no time for all that now.

SERGE. Yes. Plenty of time for all that later on. That must work itself out, but not in their way. It's

very bad with them. Their way is very bad. Nor can we live like that.

ROUSSYA. We have seen too much of it!

SERGE. Roussya, we must have mercy.

ROUSSYA. Yes. Must. Must. We "must," always. I know we must. . . . But when the old strange order of things begins to gnaw and grind you down . . . Well, well! That's enough. I'm not talking about myself . . . I mean Finotchka, for instance. What will become of her?

SERGE. I was thinking the same about Finotchka yesterday. Have you spoken to Nicky?

ROUSSYA. Yes. We talked it over.

SERGE. We must do something to help. It is all right. She is strong.

ROUSSYA. Yes. We must. It's no good standing and looking on, whatever happens.

*(From the passage, ANNA DMITRIEVNA'S voice: Serge!
Serge!)*

SERGE. It is mother. She's coming here.

ROUSSYA. Well, I'm gone. I must see Uncle Mike. Are you coming too, Serge?

SERGE. I'll come. Presently. I must first tell mother . . .

(ROUSSYA runs to the door to the right. Enters ANNA DMITRIEVNA, agitated, worried.)

ANNA. Serge! Serge! Are you there? I've been waiting and waiting. Where is Hippolyt Vassilievitch?

SERGE. He hasn't come back yet, mother.

ANNA. Why didn't you come and tell me? I asked

you definitely if Hippolyt Vassilievitch hadn't come back to——

(VOZZHIN *enters from the door leading to the hall. He has just come in from the street.*) There he is.

Hippolyt Vassilievitch, have you been at home?

VOZZHIN. At home? What do you mean? At home?

ANNA. Where have you come from?

VOZZHIN. Where from?

ANNA. What's the matter with you? I asked if you had only just come home.

VOZZHIN. Yes, in a taxi. I went in a taxi there. I came back on foot.

(SERGE *goes off quietly into UNCLE MIKE'S room.*)

ANNA. Well . . . All right. You are worrying about something, aren't you? Hippolyt, I want to have a few words with you.

VOZZHIN. A few words? Won't later on do?

ANNA. No. Please. I cannot. I can't bear it. I was anxious about you. Please.

VOZZHIN (*gives a sigh, wipes his forehead, sits down in a chair*). Well, Annette, if you must . . . I am ready.

ANNA (*sits on the sofa where ROUSSYA was sitting*). You are a straightforward man, Hippolyt. You won't lie. Tell me what is going on.

VOZZHIN. What is going on?

ANNA. Yes. I must have it straight from you and not from God knows where. I must be the first to hear . . . I've deserved that at least. . . . Is it true that you want to return to your wife?

VOZZHIN. Who said so? What nonsense!

ANNA. It's not true, then?

VOZZHIN. But my wife would not——You know she is in love with someone else. She told me herself only to-day that she loves and will never cease to love. I've only just left her.

ANNA. Only just left her?

VOZZHIN. Well. Yes. What's the harm? I had to go. You know we have a daughter. (*He gets up and paces up and down.*) And I love her—dearly. I tell you seriously I have made up my mind to have her here. I have decided it most emphatically.

ANNA. Well . . . surely. It's no affair of mine. Of course you must have your child with you if you find it is necessary.

VOZZHIN. I mean—you see—Annette. Believe me. I wanted to tell you myself. I would have broached the subject without fail. . . .

ANNA. Sit down, Hippolyt. I can't talk with you pacing up and down. . . .

VOZZHIN. You will understand, my dear. You too have a child. It is impossible to leave her there. Such an environment. Impossible to imagine. Something monstrous! The child herself is worn out. In a word, it is settled. But I didn't want to talk to you about it while there are complications. I didn't want to upset you for nothing . . . I admit perhaps also from weakness. As it is, I am in torment. And here . . . It would have killed me if to crown all you too had not understood.

ANNA. As it is I fail to understand. You say—complications?

VOZZHIN. As soon as I opened my mouth her mother

went into hysterics. The child was in torment. . . . In short, it wasn't an easy matter. . . . I made up my mind that she shouldn't stay there and then—you! . . .

ANNA. I? . . . What? . . . Hippolyt Vassilievitch, you are frightening me.

VOZZHIN (*jumps up, sits down again*). And that . . . Well, it is no use talking about it. Better discuss it later on. A better time.

ANNA (*gently*). Why, Hippolyt, why don't you respect me?

VOZZHIN. I don't respect you? . . . I? I more than respect you. I'll prove it to you. In plain, straightforward language I tell you—we must part.

ANNA (*gently*). Don't you love me any more?

VOZZHIN. Love you any more? Not love you any more? What has that to do with it? But if I have a grown-up girl in my house . . . I must devote my whole life to her. I must shield her. The child is so sensitive, so tender. I have no right . . . Annette, please understand, I am suffering profoundly. . . . It isn't easy. . . . Do understand, Annette.

ANNA. Why?—Why?—I have given you my whole life. Why do you insult me?

VOZZHIN (*gets up from the chair, sits by her side and embraces her*). Annette! Annette! . . .

(FINOTCHKA comes from the door leading to the hall, stops still by the screen, holding her muff tight to her breast, looking on without moving.)

Have I not appreciated you, understood you, felt with you, Annette? I was lonely. You gave me a woman's tenderness and sympathy. . . . You comforted me with your gentle love . . . (*kisses her*).

ANNA (*weakly*). Hippolyt! Hippolyt!

VOZZHIN. You were my bright star shining in the night, through the darkness. . . . A little star! I have an affectionate nature . . . grateful . . . I am suffering. . . . But for the child's sake I must part from you. . . . If duty speaks . . . must I not sacrifice my personal life, the comfort and sympathy for which I am ever grateful to you? . . . My dearest . . .

ANNA (*quietly weeping*). O Hippolyt! . . . After all there has been between us! . . . How am I in your way? . . . No. I suppose you want to return to your wife. Well! God be with you! . . .

VOZZHIN. I swear to you by all that is holy. . . . How could I? My dear, do understand, do believe. . . .

ANNA. What does it matter what I believe? . . . Simply you don't want me any more. You wanted me; now you don't want me any more. . . . Remember . . . You yourself wanted . . . I've given you all my life. . . . God be your judge. . . .

(She gets up, covers her face with a shawl.)

VOZZHIN. Annette! Annette!

ANNA. God be your judge.

(She runs away to the left without looking back.)

VOZZHIN. No. . . . It is impossible. . . . Annette! Annette! *(He almost shouts, and goes after ANNA to the left.)*

(FINOTCHKA, who has been standing motionless, takes a few steps forward and stops in the middle of the room, looking towards the door through which ANNA and her father have gone. The right door

from UNCLE MIKE'S room opens a bit. ROUSSYA'S alarmed face appears. Seeing FINOTCHKA standing alone, she comes in quickly and closes the door behind her.)

ROUSSYA (*approaching*). Is that you, Fina? . . . Who was shouting just now?

(FINOTCHKA *says nothing and does not move. ROUSSYA takes her by the shoulders, tries to turn her, and looks into her face.*)

Fina—do you hear me? Who was here? Your father? (FINA *is silent.*) Come here, come. . . . Sit down. . . . (*She leads her to the sofa with her arm round her.*) Now drink some water. Drink! Do you hear? Drink at once! Give me your muff. . . . Put it away. (*Takes the muff. A revolver falls heavily on the carpet.*) O! So that's it! (*Bending down, she picks up the revolver.*) Don't be afraid! I won't take it away from you. I will put it here on the table. . . . You have come to this . . . stooped so low. . . . I won't degrade myself . . . to take it away. To use force! Please do what you like with that precious thing! You are worthy of it!

(FINOTCHKA *falls with her head on the cushion and begins to cry quietly at first, then louder. ROUSSYA waits and looks at her.*)

ROUSSYA. Have you howled enough? No? Drink some more water. Drink, I tell you! Can you answer now? . . . You must have just come in. Did you see anything? Your father with Anna Dmitrievna? Did you overhear what they said?

FINOTCHKA. I was not eavesdropping. I wanted——
ROUSSYA (*contemptuous*). Why the revolver? For whom? Answer me.

FINOTCHKA. It is mother's. . . . Just so. . . . I don't know myself. . . . I ran so. . . . Father was with us. They told such lies about him. . . . I ran. . . . I wanted him to tell them himself that he . . . But he . . . And I had no time——

ROUSSYA. Right. . . . It isn't difficult to guess. My God! How sorry I am for you! My God! What a fool you are! And how unhappy!

FINOTCHKA (*standing up*). I don't want your pity. You don't know me. I don't want anyone. I'll go. . . .

ROUSSYA (*holding her back*). My God! How stupid! Well, where are you going? She imagines she has come to her senses. She imagines that she now makes a show of pride. No, you are only a fool. . . . No, you are not only a fool, you are a vicious, clumsy egoist. If you love anyone it is yourself. . . . And to love only yourself is a sin. . . . Do you understand? A folly and a sin. (FINOTCHKA *looks at her in silence*.) Well, why are you looking at me? I am rude because you are a clumsy, silly idiot, and because I am angry. . . . We have been thinking about you for a long time. I don't want to argue with you. . . . You can't knock sense into a person in one minute. What's the good of argument? I want to help, and there are you lugging your revolver about. We want to help.

FINOTCHKA. How can you help me? (*She flares up*.) There's no possible help. Nobody can help. Nobody can do anything to undo what is done. That I . . . that Mummy—that Daddy . . .

ROUSSYA (*angrily mimicking*). That Mummy—that

Daddy—that I . . . O! You! But nobody wants to do anything to make everybody dance to your tune. We only want to help you. To adapt circumstances to you—that is what must be done. We have been thinking about you. You alone won't be able to wriggle out. Wait. I'll call Serge.

FINOTCHKA. Serge? No! No! Not Serge! I don't want Serge——

ROUSSYA. You see! What a wretched creature you are! You think why you object to Serge! Think it out from your own stupid point of view. Consider. How is he to blame? He——It is just the same as you with your mother. But he is more sensible, and he is merciful.

FINOTCHKA. Roussya. . . . But that is only argument. I just love. I loved both of them terribly; and if you love so terribly, then there can be no mercy.

ROUSSYA (*thoughtfully*). I understand. Then it is difficult to be good. . . . If you love terribly you want everybody to love according to you, and only love those whom you love, and that they should always be with you. There should be no freedom at all. I understand. But it is a sin to love so terribly. Not good.

FINOTCHKA. What if it is a sin?

ROUSSYA. No. No. It shouldn't be. And we are not like that. . . . We can no longer love like that. It is terrible even to love each other like that. And these . . . grown-ups . . . our parents, nowadays, we can't love like that—without mercy. . . . It only does seem so to you. And you——

FINOTCHKA (*crying*). No. No. . . . It doesn't only seem. . . . My God! What shall I do? What shall I do?

ROUSSYA. There! I knew it was no good talking. We must help you. . . . We thought of one way. . . . Will you believe in us?

FINOTCHKA. I believe in you already . . . I mean all of you. . . . You are all I can believe in now. . . . Roussya, don't leave me. . . . Don't think I am weak . . . I am strong. . . . Only just now . . . It came so suddenly. I am strong.

ROUSSYN. And Serge? How unjust! I'll call him now. Finotchka, if we had no mercy on others, we should all be burned away. Everybody has something. My mother is an artist. She has moods. She's not much of a painter. My father is a "public man," and both of them have their affairs. What joy have they in staying together? It's just a habit. Well! . . . I'm not angry with them, and I love them very much. Surely there is nothing left for them. We shan't allow them to dispose of our lives, and in their own way they can do as they like. . . . Let them love whom they please. And you want to take away from your father all he has—by force! You condemn him! What for? How does he interfere with you?

FINOTCHKA. I don't want anything . . . I don't know what I want. . . .

ROUSSYA. Nor can you go away with your mother, nor can you stay alone. It is a sin against oneself. . . . You can't cope with it alone. Wait! Here is Serge.

(She goes to SERGE, who has come from UNCLE MIKE'S door; talks to him eagerly. Together they walk slowly towards FINOTCHKA. SERGE gravely nods his head.)

SERGE (*approaching her*). Dear Fina! . . . Now. . . . Well. . . .

FINOTCHKA. Serge. . . . And I didn't want you. . . . What Roussya says is true. . . . I am a fool. Forgive me.

SERGE (*kissing her and sitting by her side*). It's nothing. It is always so. You know—all of us—I mean the Green Ring—all of us have something. . . . Well, we cope with it somehow. The older people hamper us. And we're dependent. We love them, but we don't stand on our own feet yet.

ROUSSYA. Better not talk to her, Serge. Just sit with her. Let her come round. I'll come back in a moment.

(*She runs into UNCLE MIKE'S room.*)

SERGE (*very gently, stroking FINOTCHKA'S hair*). The chief thing is that your mother still needs you, FINOTCHKA. That's the chief difficulty. But don't be afraid! We'll find a way. We'll help you.

FINOTCHKA (*quietly*). I'll be strong.

SERGE. Yes. It is only just now that you need help. Only just now. You can't tackle it yourself. (*After a silence*) And your father—forgive him, forgive him absolutely. We always forgive them.

FINOTCHKA (*sighing deeply*). Now when I understand, it is so much easier.

SERGE. Well. You see, dear . . . Forgive——

FINOTCHKA (*again sighing*). It is hard to go on living, Serge. I will forgive. How can I not forgive now that suddenly I understand and feel so much pity? It is impossible not to forgive, but still . . . I will go away again with Mummy . . . I had my Daddy . . .

I thought he knew, that he would find a way and we should all be happy, and now, look——!

SERGE. They can do nothing for us, nothing. We are more likely to help them. If they are good they are timid, and if they are bad they are stupid. It is good that you have realised that much already. (*Musing awhile.*) There seems to be only one of them who is neither stupid nor bad—Uncle Mike.

FINOTCHKA. Ah! Not bad. He is good. He is so—so——

(*At this moment ROUSSYA enters, followed very leisurely by UNCLE MIKE.*)

UNCLE MIKE (*to ROUSSYA*). It is an ordinary tragedy, Roussya. You should live it through together.

ROUSSYA. That's just what we want, Uncle Mike. But just at this moment we must have you, we can't get on without you. . . .

UNCLE MIKE (*shrugging his shoulders*). I can't take what you have been saying seriously. . . . There's a limit to childish nonsense. I must confess I can't believe that you could all have seriously——

ROUSSYA. Is it you, Uncle Mike—talking like that—and not understanding? Well, all right—all right. We'll talk about it.

(*They go near the others. FINOTCHKA gets up and suddenly throws herself on UNCLE MIKE.*)

FINOTCHKA. Ah! Uncle Mike! . . . Dear, dear Uncle Mike! . . .

(UNCLE MIKE *awkwardly and tenderly embraces her.*)

UNCLE MIKE. Well now, my provincial idealist.

Don't be discouraged. All knowledge is to the good. And in some things you know life better than your friends of the Green Ring. . . . You are sounder, older, simpler. . . . They can invent all sorts of things. Believe them, but not too much.

FINOTCHKA (*gravely*). No. I believe them wholly. I am like them myself. Only, I have been all alone. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. Well! . . . I see. . . . Have you been chattering to her about it? (*He notices the revolver.*) And whose pretty thing may this be?

ROUSSYA (*taking the revolver from him and hiding it in FINOTCHKA'S muff*). Nobody's. We make you a present of it if you ask for it. The dinner may be badly cooked one night. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. It is dinner-time now.

FINOTCHKA. Uncle Mike, take me home to mother. You are such a comfort to her. . . . And I couldn't see father now. . . . I am better. . . . But I don't want to see him just now.

UNCLE MIKE. All right. Let us go. But what's the time?

(*He goes to look at the clock. ROUSSYA says a few words to SERGE, who follows UNCLE MIKE. She goes to FINOTCHKA and speaks to her quietly and eagerly.*)

SERGE. Has Roussya told you about our plan, Uncle Mike? About Finotchka?

UNCLE MIKE (*laughing*). Do be reasonable, Serge. . . . Your plan is—God knows what.

SERGE (*gravely*). We thought about it some time ago. We talked it over. And now you see there's no way out if we are to help her—really to help her.

UNCLE MIKE (*laughing*). Really! Really! Where's

the reality? My marrying Finotchka? . . . It's enough to make a cat laugh. . . . The idea of my marrying Finotchka! You want to help her, and therefore I'm to marry her.

SERGE (*gravely*). But only to satisfy the conventions. . . . Not actually marry—of course. That's obvious. It isn't we who have made life like that, who have made a mess of life so that we can't move a single step forward. If we could only come out into God's world, keep our freedom—then when it comes to our turn to live, it wouldn't be like that—not like that.

UNCLE MIKE. O Lord! What a commotion! How am I to knock it into you, firstly, that it isn't a joke, and secondly, that it is an absurdity. Me marry Finotchka! Take it how you like, it is farcical!

SERGE (*with bitter reproach*). It isn't a farce, it's a tragedy, Uncle Mike! We are floundering on. We can and we will struggle out! Our life is in front of us, and now—you must help us. . . . Finotchka's whole life may depend on it. Will you help? . . . Not alone . . . standing on her own feet . . . Finotchka will easily cope with her mother. Her mother will live with her here, and she wouldn't have to live with her mother away in the country. Hippolyt Vassilievitch will simmer down. O! Uncle, you can see it all better than we can. Why should we go on talking about it? . . .

UNCLE MIKE. You've found a nice practical solution!

SERGE. There's nothing new in it. In the 'sixties such marriages used to happen, you remember, to baffle circumstances, to get out of a blind alley, to get away to study. . . . We simply must help Finotchka. She is a precious creature. She will be strong. And it's all one

to you. . . . And we're not deceiving you. You see how things are!

UNCLE MIKE. Well! Nonsense! Nonsense! . . . It's amazing the lengths to which you will go. . . . Have you taken into consideration that she will grow up, may fall in love with someone and want a proper marriage? What then?

SERGE (*shrugging*). You will give her a divorce. It is quite easy now. . . . Listen, Uncle, honestly, I would marry her myself if I were on my own. As it is, you fill the part perfectly.

UNCLE MIKE (*laughing*). Well, I must say it's a perfect part! So that's how you have disposed of me! . . . You have found a nice way indeed! (*He laughs and steps forward a little.*)

(FINOTCHKA goes to him, followed by ROUSSYA.)

FINOTCHKA. Uncle Mike, she has told me such a strange—— I understand, but it is strange. . . . And, Uncle Mike, I don't want . . . I wouldn't for anything in this world if you don't understand and if you are afraid . . . I don't want—Ah! it is just like a dream! . . .

ROUSSYA. But he isn't afraid of anything in the world. And he understands wonderfully.

UNCLE MIKE. Children, let her come to herself. . . . And just think it over first. . . .

FINOTCHKA. I wouldn't for anything in the world, Uncle Mike, not for anything—if you don't want . . . If you feel that you are being forced. . . . We must have mercy. . . .

UNCLE MIKE. O no! My dear friends! I know

your mercy! Please, you can leave out your mercy with me.

ROUSSYA. Of course. Uncle . . . You are absolutely different. . . . You are our Book. You called yourself that. And now we want the binding too.

SERGE. I understand. . . . It isn't quite . . . as it ought to be, but it is impossible to do anything—anything in life so that it is perfect through and through and from every point of view! It isn't we who have messed up life, and we still have to struggle out of it as things are. . . . Later on, when there is a new life, then everything will be different, everything will be different.

UNCLE MIKE. Well! It's all very well to talk about later on, but now you propose to wriggle out through me.

ROUSSYA (*exclaiming*). But if it's all one to you!

FINOTCHKA (*agitated*). No! I see! It isn't all one to him. No, Uncle Mike! Don't! Perhaps it isn't a sound plan.

ROUSSYA. O! Be quiet! Not a sound plan!

UNCLE MIKE. Finotchka, my dear, don't exaggerate. Don't be in a hurry. If there is anyone in the world whom I regard with interest, with eagerness, with a living sympathy, it is you, all of you of the Green Ring—the coming, the future. What will come out of it I don't know, but it is interesting to look on. I shan't fail you if I am really needed. But now we must think it over, not on the spur of the moment, just anyhow. . . . Think it over well. After all, you are only children. . . .

ROUSSYA. Of course, Uncle, we will gather together to-morrow and think it over (*with childish transport*). How lovely, Uncle Mike! What meetings of the Green

Ring we will have when you and Finotchka have a house! How jolly, how free, how happy, how safe we shall all be! And Finotchka will comfort those whom she loves.

UNCLE MIKE (*smiling*). Well! We'll see! We'll see! And now, Finotchka, isn't it time? I'll see you back to your mother.

(MATILDA *enters*.)

MATILDA. Will you have dinner served? The master has sent word that he won't be in to dinner.

UNCLE MIKE. Yes. Dinner-time. Eight o'clock.

ROUSSYA (*interrupting*). Matilda, Michael Arsenievitch will be going out soon. But serve dinner. Serge and I will stay. I shan't have time to go home.

(MATILDA *goes out*.)

UNCLE MIKE. A nice way you have of ordering me about. When shall I have dinner?

FINOTCHKA. We'll dine with Mummy, Uncle Mike. There's sure to be something.

UNCLE MIKE. Something! . . . Well! All right! As you make your bed so you must lie on it. Come, Finotchka. I shall have to humour your mother. But there's no difficulty about that.

SERGE. No one must know yet. We'll tell them later.

UNCLE MIKE (*laughing*). Tell them! They'll faint away when they hear. Uncle Mike, the old fool, intends to get married!

SERGE (*gravely*). No one will faint! They will be glad! They like such things!

UNCLE MIKE (*moving to go, then coming back, half*

jocularly). Finotchka, suppose in course of time I took it into my head to fall in love with you. What shall I do then?

ROUSSYA (*laughing*). I'll tell you. . . . You'll suffer, and that will be the end of our Uncle Mike who lost his taste for life. . . . Perhaps for the better, perhaps for the worse.

FINOTCHKA. Don't . . . jest! . . . O! It's all like a dream. (*She takes the revolver from her muff.*) Take it, Uncle Mike. I feel so rested. Take it away.

UNCLE MIKE. What shall I do with it? All right. Let it lie in the table drawer. . . . Go and get ready. I'll meet you in the hall.

(*He goes to his door.*)

UNCLE MIKE. Yes. They have spun me round. I've missed my dinner, blathered a great deal. It isn't a Ring—it's a Green Wheel. They'll wriggle out of it. It is *us* whom they send spinning round. . . . Still, it is interesting to watch.

(*He goes into his room. FINOTCHKA, SERGE, ROUSSYA are left standing together, FINOTCHKA in the middle, holding hands.*)

FINOTCHKA. Like a dream! Like a dream!

SERGE. Now don't worry yourself with thinking, Finotchka. Believe that now all will be well.

ROUSSYA. She believes. Don't you, Fina? You believe that we will help you? We will. We can. If not this way, then another. But we can. . . . We want to so much; we love so much that we can't fail!

SERGE. The chief thing is that we are together and that you are ours.

FINOTCHKA. Yes. Together. I believe. I believe. . . . I feel now as if I had three souls. What will come out of it I don't know. But I know that it will be good. I love all. . . . I love tremendously, and I believe. I have three souls . . . three souls!

SERGE and ROUSSYA. Finotchka dear, all will be well.

(The three embrace.)

(Curtain.)

Green, White, and Flame

A Sort of Afterword

Hail Truth and Liberty ! Hail Youth
And onward ! Beckons the unrealised dream.

(From the poem "The Young Standard.")

I.

Perhaps in disclosing something of the theatrical history of "The Green Ring" I violate old literary customs. An author is supposed to preserve a complete silence on all matters touching his own work—save only after many years have passed, when the disclosure can be regarded "in the light of history. . . ."

But we live in queer times, which have cast off all former restrictions. Far-off events seem only of yesterday, and at moments we feel as if the last twenty-five months had been twenty-five years. And this not only in the things that matter, but even in the trivialities of life.

So, I feel that the history of my play belongs already to the historic past. It is twenty-five months old . . . but *is it*? Have not twenty-five years gone by since 1914?

And, after all, I have no objection to violating established customs. If the old rules were never broken, how should we get new ones?

If I wrote about my own work as I write about the work of others—that is, as a critic—then it would be a different affair: it would be a violation not of a custom, but of natural law. The author cannot be his own judge—never, not under any circumstances. Especially if he is a critic. For then his judgment would be of unlimited mercilessness—which is once more an injustice.

So, apart from all these considerations, I will simply pass on to "history."

The new youth seriously occupied my mind. We have seen more than enough of the previous young. Them we did not condemn, but they filled us with sadness . . . and fear; and a desire to understand what was the matter. Surely, the clearer the understanding, the less the fear.

To condemn those previous young . . . how could one condemn!

"Born in the weary years
They cannot recall their way.
We—the children of Russia's years of horror—
We may forget nothing.

Those burning, charring years!
Of the days of war, of the "days of freedom,"
A bloody gleam is on our faces.
But over our death-bed
The crows may hover. Let them!
May those that worthier than we are, Lord, O Lord,
Look on Thy kingdom!"

(ALEXANDER BLOK.)

Is not here the key? Yes, in those, just those "born in the weary years" who have experienced at the dawn of youth the "days of war" and "days of freedom," experienced in all actuality, there—

"In the hearts once enraptured
There is a fatal emptiness—"

"A bloody gleam on the faces"—to this we must refer the emptiness, and dumbness, and everything that was

or that might have been with "the children of Russia's years of horror. . . ." Who knows? Those years, perhaps, were more horrible in the transit even than these years that pass now.

The grass withereth—but the earth withereth not, and gives forth new shoots. And these new shoots, men born not in the "dreary," but in the "horrific" years, they must be truly different. Not in the memory nor in the feelings of the new men are those horrific years, but in their blood. Behind them, there is the experience of others—deep experience which has not charred the will and the heart of the new young, but only fired their blood.

Certainly they are not yet "worthier," but they can become worthier, and therefore they must accomplish their work, and testify to those who perish.

". . . May they look on Thy kingdom!"

In all this there is, if you like, a great deal of theory and lyricism; all theories are untrue, all lyricism is supra-mundane. But something is stirring in life itself, and coming forth to face both theory and lyricism.

Indeed, is there not another, a new gleam on our faces? Of course, it is impossible to say that the significant years must play this or that rôle definitely, or that men with the "new gleam" must be exactly of such and such an age, such and such a generation. You cannot grasp life with arithmetic. And of course in my long "Chronicle of the Green Ring" the young people happen to be youthful heroes rather than simple youthful persons. It just happened so. But from the beginning I took the word "Green" to signify, not so much mere "youth," as the wider reality, growth, life-force itself, renascence.

The fragmentary notes of the "Chronicle" served me first as material for several stories, and then for this play. Perhaps they will be of still further service to me. Surely at the bottom of the soul lies the question which cannot be avoided: the question of old and new, of Yesterday, To-day, and To-morrow.

In January 1914 my play was ready. I had had little experience of the theatre, but many dreamings which might fulfil themselves in the theatre. So I confess that my piece was written by me theatrically—dreaming: that is, it is almost not *written*. It is shadowed-in, given to such actors as "are not on earth" (I prefer to think they are not *yet* on earth). When they come, then there will be plays a hundred times less *written* than mine. The business of the author is to create visions and situations. The substance itself (and words are substance) must be born from author and actor *together*. If I, an actor upon the stage, become in myself the creature I wish to be, the creature whom I conceive together with the author, then shall I not utter in the given situation just those words which the living creature must utter in that situation? Can I in such a circumstance merely pronounce words written by one man in a solitary study, and by me learned off by heart? So long as the living word is thus set down, apart from any contact with the actors, without any conjunction between author and actor, no marriage having taken place between the two, so long shall we fail to produce a true literary or artistic theatre. It will be as it is now: the theatre is one thing, and literature another. If in Russia rare *liaisons* still take place between the two, then look at France. There, without exception, the

more theatrical the play, the less literary: and *vice versa*.

Excursions into the future are too frequently injurious to the present. Therefore the comparatively scanty *writtenness* of "The Green Ring" (whence the shortness of the text) could be expected to prove only a stumbling-block to the actors. Those actors whom it would *help* "are not on earth."

Meyerhold is our famous innovator. But the Alexandrinsky Theatre (of Petrograd) has taught him a living, realistic, sober outlook. When "The Green Ring" was read to him, he superbly realised its dreamy *unwrittenness*, the difficulties resulting therefrom, and—he was not afraid. Without hesitation he undertook to produce the play—he even *wanted* to produce it: he liked the work. I mention this because I wish to make a confession: we did not expect from our talented producer so ardent an interest in such a play. It seemed to us that the external poverty and simplicity, the realistic, lifelike appearance of the work would have repelled a man like Meyerhold, who favoured an art so different, showy and full of splendour. We were mistaken. I will relate further on how unusually and how deeply Meyerhold realised in "The Green Ring" that which *was* to be realised in it.

Soon the question of production was more or less settled. The theatre-management received the play with attention and goodwill. Roschina-Insarova, that slender, passionate actress, was carried away by the possibility of turning herself into a sixteen-year-old girl. Meyerhold was already pondering how widely he could make use of the actor—youth. The play passed the censor in two days, without any

excisions. Everything was smooth, quiet, straightforward.

Under the then existing conditions one thing still remained, almost a formality: the play had to pass the literary censorship.

This could not trouble us, since a writer of such long experience and old standing as mine could hardly perpetrate a completely unliterary work. On the contrary, just that old literary standing of mine was unpleasant to me. I wanted the piece to be approved on its own merits, apart from my name. For this reason the play was sent in, officially, to a town remote from the Neva.

We went abroad, and, distracted by other things, did not inquire for news of the play.

The information that the work had not passed the literary censorship was communicated to us, on our return, by Meyerhold. He was astounded—more so than I was. The hard school of a writer had inured me to anything. But after all it was my turn to be astounded.

The judges of "The Green Ring" might perhaps have found it illiterate: such things happen when people form an opinion in haste, and *ex officio*, of an unknown writer. But no! "The Green Ring" was confessedly not illiterate, but—immoral! That was indeed startling.

As a literary production, the work was loaded with most immoderate praise, unusual even for me. With the thickest coat of gold did the critical authors cover the pill which, as censors and guardians of morality, they had prepared for me. What made such obviously inexperienced people assume such rôle as theirs, is a riddle. Sincere anxiety, alarm, and irritation were

revealed in the report on the work : and no brief report it was, either. The irritation was aroused not so much by the author ("talented" and "clever," etc.), as by the young heroes of the Ring. What does it all mean? Are not these the "Fag-Ends" reappearing, with their free love and suicide clubs? Are the late years returning on us again? Young persons who "do not want" to talk about sex—we know what their "do not want" means. These are not children as we see them—charming in their innocence and ignorance, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." They read books! They read Hegel! Puppies, with their Hegel! "Well, let them read books by people of their own age (*sic!*), if they are not satisfied with those of older men."

I do not exaggerate. On the contrary, I skim over the outburst, so as not to dwell too long on it. That irritated tone, however, showed me what was the matter. It was not literary critics judging my work; it was parents and grandfathers, tutors and teachers, taking up arms against my young heroes. They, the old ones, gathered together in school council and decided to pluck out the evil at the root—to prohibit "The Green Ring" and dismiss the suspicious puppies. (Is it not suspicious? They read Hegel!)

How did "The Green Ring" take all this? Did it rise up? Did it rebel? Did it seek to vindicate itself? Not at all. It regarded these old ones along with all the others—"with mercy."

II

During the summer I exchanged a lively correspondence with A. A. Stakhovitch, who intended to produce "The Green Ring" in the *Studia* of the Moscow Art Theatre. But this was cut short, as everything was cut short then—the war broke out.

Then, who could think of theatres, plays, literature, art? I will add in parenthesis, that if such universal not-thinking could have continued, it would have been so much the better for these very theatres, plays, and art altogether. Probably. I won't insist on it.

However, a good part of the winter passed—and then suddenly "The Green Ring" issued into being, it swam forth from a most unexpected shore.

Meyerhold, the "representative of the new movement," sent the play to Marya Gavrilovna Savina, a "representative of the old movement." An enemy to an enemy. Were not Meyerhold and Savina regarded as such? Who could imagine *her* acting in one of Meyerhold's productions?—and, into the bargain, in a play by an author whose name, in the good old days, was tainted with a suspicion of "decadence." None the less, it came to pass.

I shall not go into the question of how accepted views came to change, how old positions broke down, how the apparently irreconcilable was reconciled, how seemingly opposite realities became unified. There are many causes. And I consider "The Green Ring" as only one of the accidental factors in the reunion. "I am first

of all an artist," said Marya Gavrilovna. "I consider Meyerhold also an artist. Why should we not act together?"

And together they took—"The Green Ring." This was the first occasion of their being together—certainly it would not have been the last. . . . It was made the last through Savina's unexpected death. Unexpected and early. I assert that there were in Savina enormous sources of unused artistic youth.

Not as a "senior," not as a strict mother or schoolmistress, did Savina regard the young members of the new group. At the loudly proclaimed "immorality" of the work she simply laughed—not without irony. The part she had to take in the play was a small one, only appearing in one act. But Marya Gavrilovna set her mind on acting it, she set her mind on making the play go.

So it was begun.

Formerly, I had had only glimpses of Savina. The more distinctly do I remember our meetings of last year (her last year!) at her house or at my house, sometimes with Meyerhold, sometimes by ourselves. She interested me as the most living, truthful, new book. I always wanted to turn the conversation about my play into a general conversation—I wanted her to speak, judge, live, as she herself was. For she herself was—someone's magnificent work of art.

Any work she undertook, Savina regarded with careful attention and extreme minuteness. My indifference, as an author, and my repeated "As you like, Marya Gavrilovna," somewhat angered her. This was my first piece, she said to herself. But actors are

not writers—they do not know the stern school of an author, which thoroughly cures all nervous ambitions and agitations.

With Meyerhold, Savina had a serious tussle over her own part in the "Ring." What is this creature, this character—a wretch or not a wretch? I was appealed to as referee. To my mind Meyerhold was more right. But I did not want to judge between them. Let Savina create the type she visualised: she would create it artistically.

Generally my principle was, to meddle as little as possible. Complete freedom and confidence—in the goodwill of the actors . . . of the experienced and the inexperienced . . . the inexperienced would have Meyerhold's help, and he had every liberty—he might make any variations whatever in the text.

The rehearsals were hasty and irregular, as always in the Alexandrinsky Theatre. Still, I do not know much about these things, and am just as much surprised at the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, who have managed not to learn their parts threadbare by the 210th rehearsal, as at the Alexandrians, who at times play superbly after the tenth.

I contrived to see only one rehearsal, some ten days before the performance—and even this without the second act (Savina's).

We went to the theatre about ten o'clock in the evening together with A. A. Blok. (Of course he knew the play, and liked it.)

On our way we were calling to mind Blok's "Balagantchik" ("Show-Booth"), produced in Mme. Kommissarjevskaja's Theatre by the same Meyerhold, some ten years before.

"Were you satisfied with your piece?" I asked. "Did it please you?"

"No."

Blok speaks little, but always very definitely.

A simple rehearsal in an empty, half-dark theatre is a pleasant, soothing event. Nothing is quite completed, nothing is quite right, but you see the process of completion, you see competent men, and it is curious to watch.

However, I. M. Yuriev, who took the part of Uncle Mike, was already complete. He did not act at all. Simply Uncle Mike walked there—that was all. I think rarely has an author seen on the stage such a perfect incarnation of a created vision as I saw then in Uncle Mike—Yuriev. He was just the same in the performances later on. Is he not too young?—some asked. No. If he had been older he would not have been Uncle Mike—not the real one.

The Green Ring themselves, the scene of their meeting, was working out badly. "Look how they understand nothing," Blok whispered to me. "They don't even understand the simple meaning of the words they speak; and for that reason they don't know how to sit down or how to stand up."

Meyerhold saw it not less than Blok. And after that scene he gathered the youngsters (some of them real youngsters, only just finishing school) in the foyer of the theatre. "Understand," he agitatedly persuaded the young players—"do understand that the whole meaning of this scene lies in the—*together*. Each one must feel he is a living part of one living whole. And all the time that wholeness is *here*. Move about, muddle, interrupt one another, but don't listen to yourselves,

listen to the whole, to the all of you. No muddle matters, so long as you will remember you are *together*, just that living *togetherness* which acts all the time in you and amongst you."

I do not remember the exact words and the technical side of Meyerhold's speech, but its essence is just as I give it. And once more it convinced me that Meyerhold knew the centre, the central meaning of "The Green Ring," which maybe is not sufficiently brought out in the play: the secret, the *joy of togetherness*.

At the final rehearsal, in the dressing-rooms and corridors no actor was to be recognised: they were all real youngsters. Smolitch was an out-and-out school-boy "with a serious future." Roschina-Tusarova looked a wayward, unformed girl. And of Domashova, genuine schoolgirls, friends of mine, real members of one of the real Green Rings, asked after the performance: "But, really, Domashova is not more than fifteen years old, is she? How has she managed to become an actress?"

Not much remains to be added to my recollections. The first performance took place on the 18th April (1916). The play went off just as other plays did and do. It brought full houses—since the war all plays brought full houses. It was just as badly torn to pieces by the evening papers and the morning papers as any other play. Yet no—it had even worse treatment than most. There was an irritation that reminded me of the first private opinion of the old litterateurs. Only this time the critics did not guess the "immorality." It cannot have occurred to them. Too far from immoral Meyerhold's "children" appeared.

Not the actual criticism (that was ordinary), but just the little note of irritation was curious. Again, the old—

authorities, parents, teachers, and deciders—grew angry with the bold youth. Puppies, reading Hegel! Coming on with their “mercy”! We don’t want your mercy, we want your obedience.

Neither do such young people exist—so the self-sufficient oldsters reassure themselves. It is all an invention. Everything is still all right.

I do not argue: it is much more peaceful for the old not to think at all about the new. Dismiss the whole affair. It is easy enough if you wish to do it. The new is ripening in silence and latency, the young do not write in newspapers.

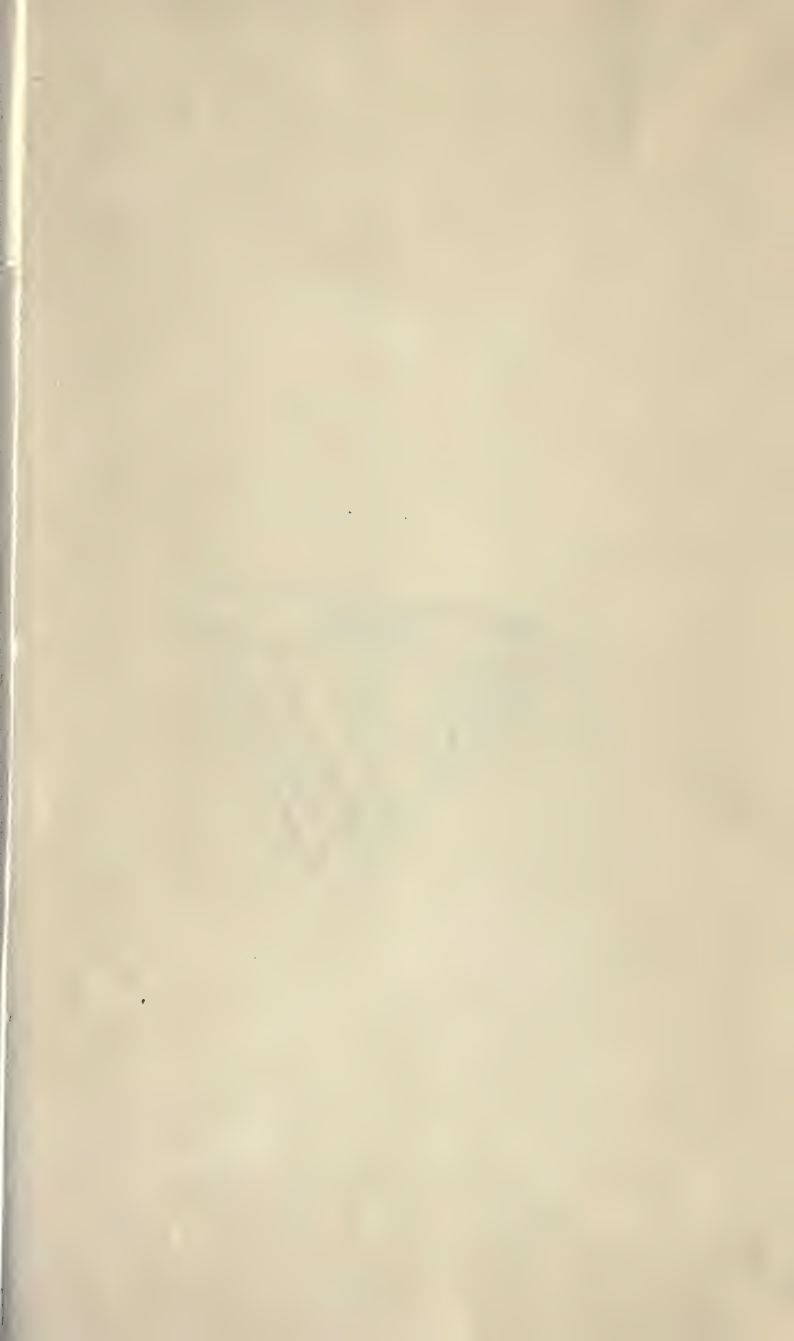
Well, and if the new comes to pass? Let to-day be as long as it will, to-morrow will certainly come, whether you shut your eyes to it or not. Will To-morrow’s men be such as the heroes of “The Green Ring,” or something else? Are to-morrow’s men all young, according to a calculation of years?—I do not know. This much, however, I do know, that for their building they will make their own foundations, they won’t use the old ones. —“We have had enough of their old arrangement.”—Also I know that the struggle with the young will not be spared to the old, however much these latter may assure themselves that “everything is all right” “everything is in its place.”

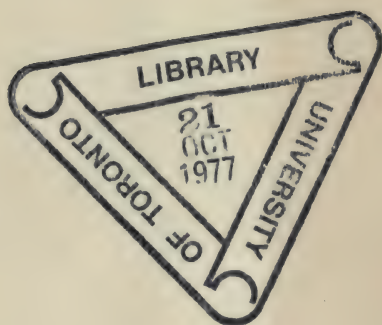
The very hastiness of the assurances, the stuccoing-over of the problem, and the anger, already show that the present-day men are not quite at ease. An alarm is rising up. The foundations tremble. . . .

Over the heads of the men of the past, who are timidly hating or indifferently not-understanding, I send a greeting to those who will come to-morrow. To all those young in years and heart, who in silence forge the

weapon of "knowledge and freedom," who have a foretaste of the joy of the struggle, and believe in the power of togetherness, to all, to those near and known, and to those far off and unknown—to all, all!

And the old hatred is not terrifying. The men of the future have "mercy" . . . it is implacable, it will conquer.







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The green ring

